

Go Inquire of the Lord

"Go, inquire of the Lord for me and for the people and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that has been found; for great is the wrath of the Lord that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not listened to the words of this book, to conform to all that is written in it concerning us."

II KINGS 22:13 (Smith-Goodspeed translation)

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GO INQUIRE
OF THE LORD

by GERALD KENNEDY



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This Is for John D. Crummev

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"And the officers shall speak further unto the people, and they shall say, What man is there that is fearful and fainthearted? let him go and return unto his house, lest his brethren's heart faint as well as his heart."

DEUTERONOMY 20:8

Preface

The chapters of this book, with one exception, contain the substance of the Quillian Lectures delivered at the Candler School of Theology, Emory University, in January, 1951. The actual lectures were slanted in the direction of preachers who made up the majority of the audiences, while the written chapters are aimed more at laymen. The two groups are not so far apart as is sometimes assumed, and a "preacher's preacher" is simply one who can challenge men in their own field.

Mrs. Kennedy and I will not forget the delightful week spent on the Emory campus. The courtesies of Dean H. B. Trimble and the faculty will be a shining place in our memories. One of the great privileges of being a bishop of the Methodist Church is the opportunity it affords to get acquainted with the ministers and laymen in all sections of the country. I have learned that the famed hospitality and charm of the South has not been exaggerated.

This book is small in size and scope. It intends only to bear witness to one man's faith that the real questions find their real answers in the Gospel. These are not all the questions, and the light is able to penetrate my mind

only as through a glass darkly. But though the mystery is limitless, I know the light is there, and that is enough for any man to live by.

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Go Inquire of the Lord

I

What Must I Do To Inherit?

... *what must I do to inherit eternal life?* MARK 10:17 (R.S.V.)

The story of the rich young ruler is so familiar and has been used so often for sermon inspiration that it would seem to be exhausted like a worked-over mine. Yet there is in it an element seldom noticed—the assumption on the part of the young man that in order to inherit eternal life one must do something. There is brought together in his question two things which are usually kept apart in our religion. For one of the basic conflicts in Christian theology has been between those proclaiming that salvation is free, and those insisting that it has to be earned. I know of no brief word in the New Testament which brings these two seeming antagonisms together so naturally and inevitably.

The first impression we are likely to get from the young man's question, if we consider it seriously, is obscurity and conflict. It would seem as if two voices were shouting at the same time that salvation is inherited, and that salvation has to be earned. It looks like a futile attempt to combine faith and works as the basis of eternal life. One might feel like saying to the young man, "Make up your mind. Either eternal life is inherited and hence independent of human effort, or else it is a reward given to men who meet certain requirements. But you cannot have it both ways and to talk about doing something in order to accept an inheritance is nonsense." But if we take the time to consider the matter more seriously, we shall see that the question goes directly to the root of a mysterious truth. Salvation is both a receiving and a doing.

A great deal of our complaining about the condition of the world and God's failure to set it right is due to our confusion in this matter. How often in these days we hear some sincere soul say, "Why does God allow these things to happen?" It would seem that there is so much tragedy, so much undeserved suffering, so much evil, that He ought to do something about it, and that right quickly. Men who have not thought for years of their own religious obligations are ready to complain that God is not fulfilling His.

This complaining mood is often no more than a selfish man's refusal to accept his personal responsibility for society. But there are times when it is the pathetic, desper-

ate cry of spirits overwhelmed by the world's ruthless torturing of their loved ones. The forces at work are beyond their control and their understanding. Surely, God ought to intervene under these circumstances, and this cry is the agony of Jesus' word on the Cross, "My God, why . . . ?" We shall neither despise nor patronize these people, but seek to bring the healing word to them. When we are confronted with our brethren in this mood, it is for us to seek humbly for the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that we may justify the ways of God to them.

We must never doubt that God is willing and anxious to heal every broken heart and release every child from his prison house of pain. We must not doubt God's desire to share His life with men. If the Bible is true, then the love of God is the very foundation of the universe and we can bet our lives on it. If the contemporary tragedy is not brought to an end, it is not because God does not will it to end, and the answer has to lie somewhere in the realm of man's ability to prevent God doing what He wants to do. Somehow, the divine willingness to give is being blocked by the human unwillingness to receive. The moral realm exists, no doubt, and within that kingdom the divine imperative must operate. The inheritance has been promised and the Father is ready to bestow it, but it cannot be bestowed until we speak the words of the young man who came to Jesus, "What must I do to inherit?"

We must come face to face with the indivisibility of doing, being and receiving. We separate these matters for

the purpose of emphasis and discussion, but in actual living they constitute a unity. Men do not produce goodness if they are not good, any more than you can expect to reap figs from thistles. But neither are men good without doing good works. What men can receive, then, is dependent on both what they are and what they do. The various periods of emphasis on one of these factors and neglect of the others have produced one-sided Christianity. It would be well for every man to keep clear the question of the rich young ruler and ask it for himself: "What must I do to inherit?"

The Best Things Are Gifts

The central meaning of the Christian experience lies in John's familiar words: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (3:16). Our motivation springs from this miracle of love and grace. He who makes his Christianity merely a matter of good resolve and duty never enters into the joy known by the saints, nor does he succeed in producing their good works. Our religion becomes lifeless and dry as dust whenever it fails to keep rooted in the amazing grace of God. There was a period during R. W. Dale's ministry at Carr's Lane Chapel in Birmingham, England, when he opened every Sunday morning worship service with the great Easter hymn: "Christ the Lord is Risen Today, Hallelujah." I do not know all that lay back of that custom but I should imagine that Dr. Dale was

anxious to keep God's gift of Christ central in the minds of his people. And what is true of this greatest experience is true of all great experiences; namely, they are given.

The more wisdom we attain, the more we cease to believe that we can deserve or earn the best things in life. We begin our life as takers and not givers. Now and again a man will whine about the shabbiness of having been born without his consent; but when we are spiritually healthy, we marvel and rejoice that life is given unto us through our parents and they protect us and provide for us during our helpless years. No man who is fortunate enough to have a woman promise to share his life in a happy marriage ever feels that he is merely getting what he deserves. One of the constant sources of renewal for any marriage is the consciousness of what has been bestowed, which by no stretch of the imagination was deserved. In all the great ventures of our living, we are aware of being on the receiving end.

Friendship and love are never amenable to law. They will not be confined by rules and they will obey no logical advices. They seem to glory in growing out of the most unlikely soil and springing into bloom in the most unexpected places. Try to command them and they are out of your reach; put your demands upon them and they are gone; regard them as wages to be paid for service performed and they fade from your sight. Love can only be received, but never can it be earned, and friendship is so far beyond our deserving that we cannot think of it in terms of merit. No man has ever done enough to make

him worthy of a spring day or a summer night, and no man has any illusions of having any claim on love, unless his egotism has made him dead to reality.

Nothing is more indicative of our spiritual inadequacy than the pagan way we celebrate Christmas and Easter. So far as the birthday of our Lord is concerned, it might be a time of giving gifts to those who are in need but cannot repay us. That would be in the spirit of Jesus and it would bestow upon us a great spiritual blessing. But since it has become a matter of giving to those who will give to us, and spending more for show than we can afford, Christmas has become too often an exhausting, frustrating and worldly show. Easter, which ought to refresh our spirits as we open our lives to God's life in Christ, has become a time for vainglory and hollow pretense. This, I suppose, is inevitable when men cease to realize how undeserving they are to receive the gifts of God symbolized by these two events.

The main truth about us is that we are debtors. Let a man stop for five minutes at any time of the day, in any place, and think of his obligations to others, and his pride will be reduced considerably. We stand on the shoulders of many other men and we are served by thousands. Every person is surrounded by numberless persons whose efforts make his life more comfortable. It may be the great teacher who will come to our mind as we think of the men who have put us in their debt, or it may be the man who takes away the garbage. But if society means

anything at all, it means being served far beyond one's deserving, and the sensitive person will never deny his debts.

It is the Christian insight that eternal life is the gift of God. We are not automatically immortal and naturally destined for the life everlasting. The Resurrection of our Lord is a special act of God and it is the guarantee of our own rising. We are bound by sin and death, but in Christ we have been set free; and among all the things they owe to Christ, Christians have never doubted that the ultimate gift was victory over death. The unique quality in the teaching of the New Testament about death lies in this realization that it is God's gift to us through His Son.

A boy stood looking at the royal hothouse gardens in Sweden. His mother was ill and he wanted desperately to take her some of the grapes he saw hanging on the vines. At last he mustered up courage to ask the gardener if he could not buy one bunch, but he was sternly refused. A young man standing near by heard the request and cut off two fine bunches and put them in the boy's hand. When money was offered, the young man, who was the prince, refused the payment, saying, "My father is not a merchant who sells; he is a king who gives."¹ Our God is like that. He has made our life not a matter of buying, but of receiving. The best things in life are free,

¹ Chappell, *When the Church Was Young*, Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1950, 122.

and the treasures most worth possessing are gifts to be received thankfully, but never can they be deserved or earned.

It Is Not Easy To Receive

There hangs on the office wall of a friend of mine a picture which I looked at once and never forgot. It shows two old Jews fleeing from a burning city. A pogrom, apparently, has broken out and they are trying to escape. But they carry in their arms the scroll of the Law. This had to be preserved though it meant leaving all their other possessions. There is summed up in that single scene the cost of being a chosen people to whom the Law could be entrusted. It was a matter of sacrificing for it and risking one's life for it. It was, in a word, a willingness to dedicate a people's destiny to the single purpose of appreciating and accepting the burden of the Law that the joy of the Law might be possessed.

Ownership is a simple matter if we are dealing with things which can be owned. The man who has the money can buy whatever is for sale, and it is only a matter of price. A materialistic age will go no farther than this and will assume that to hold title to some coveted trinket is success. The man who tore down the old barns and built larger ones to hold his wealth is with us always and he is usually the popular model for those who would get on in the world.

This spirit is an example of the tragic oversimplification on the part of men who live only on the surface. If

your pleasures are merely matters of sensation and your values are of the flesh, then it all comes down to a matter of "how much?" and "what must I do to get the price?" The rich collector exemplifies price applied to art. I know a man who has a library full of first editions and rare volumes. It is not good for me to enter his library because the spirit of covetousness is well nigh irresistible. Yet I have never been able to see any indications that these books have entered into the mind and spirit of my friend. He does not know what is in the books, and the few he has taken time to read have made no deep impression on him. But he owns the books and he takes a certain pride in showing them to visitors.

I made the rounds of a millionaire's home one time and looked at his paintings. But it was more like being conducted over a stock farm while the owner took inventory. This one cost so much, he would say, and that one was obtained through this clever trick. I remembered the rapt expression on the face of a poor student as he looked at a painting in the Louvre and thought of what one of these masterpieces would mean to him if he could hang it in his room. To buy a picture as an investment would have seemed like sacrilege to him, but to this wealthy man it was the only thing that justified art. He bought the pictures but in no real sense did he possess them.

It is no wonder that this spirit finally convinces men that everything is for sale, even the respect of men. Not so! You can hire men to serve you but there is no way you can force them to respect you. That is a free gift

which is bestowed freely or it is not bestowed at all. Probably the final disillusionment comes when powerful men realize, when it is too late, that no one really cares about them. Let such a man lose his wealth, his power, and he discovers that he never really possessed the loyalty of a single man.

All of this means, of course, that there is a vast difference between ownership and possession. We learn there are some things which a man may possess though he does not own them and, indeed, he never can own them. But there are also things which he owns and does not possess. The man who can turn the pages of one great book and enter into the spiritual possession of a great writer is richer than my friend who owns the library of rare editions. The poor student who enters with appreciation into the work of an artist is to be envied over the man who buys the picture for an investment. Ownership is a relatively minor matter when you compare it with the ability to possess.

I would rather have one friend who knows all about me and still gives me his love than to be in a position to compel a hundred men to do my bidding. With every passing year of life, a man needs to believe that he has succeeded in winning the gift of respect from the men who know him. When at last it becomes plain that one's associates do not really admire him, that is failure. The selfish playboy, who thinks he is so popular in certain circles because he spends wastefully, is about as wise in his way of living as Esau giving up his birthright for a

mess of pottage. It is simply no good, and preference for ownership over possession is the sure sign of sick souls.

Today we are learning another terrifying thing: namely, that peace is not for sale. If only we could buy a secure society and an orderly world, we could find the money easy enough. Or if peace were only a matter of armaments, we would continue to stock-pile our atom bombs and develop our hydrogen bombs, knowing that all is well. But peace can never be obtained that easily. It goes back to the establishment of justice for men, and sharing with the dispossessed millions of the earth. We can pray glibly for peace, but we cannot bring ourselves to do what is necessary before we can receive it. It must be a heavy burden on the heart of God to listen to the prayers for peace which are prayed by men whose lives make it impossible for them to receive this gift which He is anxious to give them.

One comes to see at last that receiving is not easy. The best things are given but the best things cannot come to men who are cheap and trivial. One has to become a kind of person before he can receive. It may be that the rich young ruler had some inkling of this when he asked his question, "What must I do?" No man ever forgot being forgiven, but no man ever escaped the feeling that it is a terrible thing to be forgiven. It will not work for all men, precisely because they are unwilling or unable to receive it. But to the man who can accept it, forgiveness will redeem his life and save his soul.

A man was converted at an evangelistic mass meeting.

A friend who heard about it met the man on the street the next day. "I heard you got religion last night," he greeted him. "That is right," his friend replied, "and it has changed my life." "Then," said the man, "I suppose you will be paying me back the money you borrowed a year ago." "No," said his friend, "the Lord forgave me that debt along with my sins." And that is about as deep as some of our conversions go. When a man truly finds the life of God in Christ, it revolutionizes every part of his behavior and it makes him restore fourfold to all those he has robbed. The gifts of God are free but they cannot be received by men who continue in their sin, and there has been no real salvation until a man can say, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold" (Luke 19:8).

Receiving Is An Act

It is necessary to think of receiving as an act and not merely as a neutral passivity. Since the receiving is never done in a vacuum, it has social implications. The isolated, unrelated person cannot receive until he has come into right personal relationships again. One wonders what communism has that wins so many converts in spite of its tyrannies and persecutions. We have a clue in the words of Simonov, a Russian writer:

I, personally, cannot bear loneliness. . . . If you ask me what the Soviet system has done for the writer I should answer that, first of all, it has erased from his inner self all

sense of loneliness, and given him the feeling of complete and absolute "belonging" to society and the people.²

One of the reasons our generation is not able to be saved and communism flourishes is that our life is lived too much in isolation and too little in fellowship.

The prodigal son had to return home before he could begin to receive, and we ought to make more of the necessity for that decisive act on his part as a necessary preliminary to the bestowal of his father's gifts. *The Man Without a Country* illustrates the same thing. There is no finding of life so long as we are cut off from our brethren and walled in by our own egos. Many a man waits in vain for gifts from his Father because he will not say, "I will arise and go . . ." (Luke 15:18).

This is one of the fundamental reasons for the Church and it was never more needed than now. The Church remains the last institution which provides a universal fellowship for rich and poor, young and old, wise and simple. Everything else makes its appeal to segregated groups, and the last hope for the preservation of family life in social settings is the Church. One of the miracles to be observed by ministers and church members is a redemption of individual lives, which was impossible until persons were brought back into Christian relationship with their fellows. It is a strange and mysterious truth that God cannot give his gifts to the man who is in bitter isolation.

Receiving is dependent on the right environment and

² Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, Doubleday, 1948, 472.

it waits for us to make the necessary changes in our environments. When at last we move into the dimension of eternal life, what wonderful things God can do for us. When we no longer have the feeling that our backs are to the wall, we have the sense of having plenty of depth for our defense. The small nation with no room for maneuvering is no match for the great nations like America, Russia, China, which have room enough for the setting up of their defenses. So a man's life needs the vast hinterlands of eternity to appropriate patience, endurance and hope. John Gunther relates an anecdote which he says is probably apocryphal. It is about Madame Pauker, a well-known Communist leader who was walking down the streets of Bucharest one day, carrying an umbrella, though the sun was shining. When asked concerning this strange behavior, she replied: "Ha! You have not seen the weather report. In Moscow it is raining."³ And the reason men can know such unexplainable joy and peace in the midst of such unfavorable circumstances is that they have learned how to live in the climate of the Kingdom of God.

Receiving is an act which not only depends on where you are but on what you are. You cannot give a people democracy until they are able to accept it. The Germans had a chance after World War I but a man named Hitler had the power to take it away. The German problem today is whether the people are able to accept a better way than Nazism and cleanse themselves from the anti-Semitic poison. It would be a rash prophet who would

³ Gunther, *Behind the Curtain*, Harper, 1948, 124.

speaking with certainty about the outcome. We Americans have a great responsibility in the matter, but at the end of the day the choice must be Germany's and the whole matter rests on a German act of receiving. Liberty is a very great gift, but it costs constant alertness and eternal sacrifice.

When Napoleon was at the height of his power, he learned of an uncle who was a village priest living eighteen miles from Florence. He could not bear to have his mother's brother a humble nobody, and he sent a captain to bring him to Paris to assume a place of importance in the Church. But the old man refused to leave his parish and seemed to have no ambition to be anything but what he was. Napoleon was angry but the old man had his way, dying at the age of ninety-five, beloved by all the people of the village. Napoleon was on St. Helena when the uncle died, and one wonders what thoughts went through his mind when he heard about this only relative who had refused his gifts, and was the only relative who died happy. But the priest had known what it would cost to accept his nephew's offer and he preferred to do what was necessary to keep close to God. Every gift demands an action on the part of the receiver and it is for us to decide which gifts and whose gifts we shall prepare ourselves to accept.

Receiving Is A Responsibility

The anguish caused by a Christmas necktie from a beloved aunt is that soon or late you will have to wear it. No decent man accepts a gift unless he uses it, for like it

or not, the act of accepting involves the duty of using. The man who hides his talent in the ground is guilty of the supreme insult to the giver and must be punished for it.

Strangely enough, giving is my best method for preparing my soul to receive. The more I can give, the more I shall be able to receive of the bounty God would bestow on me. It is not a matter of God cutting us out of His will because He gets annoyed at our selfishness. It is simply a matter of cutting ourselves out of His will because what He has purposed to give us we cannot receive. The disappointed men are so often the men who missed their chances through lack of vision or readiness. The gift was offered but they could not take it because somewhere there had been a failure to make themselves ready to receive it. Lord North, who suffered from gout after he became Prime Minister of England, remarked that if he had known his old legs would one day carry a Prime Minister he would have taken better care of them.

By giving we prepare ourselves to receive, and by receiving we prepare ourselves to give; for a man cannot receive and keep the gift to himself. We are in the presence of another mystery, but if we are going to keep the fruits of the spirit, then we must share them. Remember again our story. "What must I do?" asked the young man. "Sell and give," was the answer. It is for us to begin now to live like heirs of the King. We are not beasts of the jungle, or automatons, or physical machines. We are the children of the King who have been designated as the

recipients of his treasures. It is for us to ask what we must do, and then prepare our hearts for His presence.

Remember Kierkegaard's famous parable of the geese. One of their number spoke to them every seventh day about the greatness of their fathers. They had been able to fly, this preaching goose announced, and then he went on to describe the joys of soaring through the heavens. What a wonderful thing it was that their creator should have given them wings to fly and the spirit to explore the skies. The other geese nodded their heads solemnly, but they did nothing more about it, for the barnyard gave them security and the corn was good. We, too, can meditate on the wonders of eternal life and even go so far as to express an academic interest in it. But what we ought to do is go to our Lord and ask, "What shall we do to possess this great gift?" And then, unlike the young man who came to him so long ago, we should act as he commands us and enter into our heritage. The full experience of what God has in store for us will not be realized until we are called home; but as St. Paul said, we have been given now the gift of the Holy Spirit, "which is an earnest of our inheritance" (Ephesians 1:14, A.S.V.).

II

When Are We Alive?

And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent. JOHN 17:3

One of the great hymns of the Church was written by Charles Wesley and has been used for over one hundred and seventy years to open Methodist Conferences. Some have come to feel that Conference is hardly possible until the Bishop announces this hymn and the brethren stand together and sing:

And are we yet alive
And see each other's face
Glory and praise to Jesus give
For his redeeming grace.

The first line is no longer regarded literally. While it is true that some of the preachers have been wounded by the Finance Committee, and some may have been attacked by the Pastoral Relations Committee, hardly ever in recent times has a preacher had his life actually threat-

ened. But it was not always so. In the early days of Methodism, its preachers were attacked by mobs and their lives threatened by ruffians. They came to their annual meetings after walking in danger and facing death. I should like to have heard one of those early Conferences sing: "And Are We Yet Alive?"

The English Methodists are discovering a rich source of theology and Christian experience in the early hymns of the movement. They were for many a humble believer the source of his Christian inspiration. This is not to say, of course, that every hymn Charles Wesley wrote is of great significance, for some of them are better forgotten. But he was such a prolific writer that he did much to shape the thought and emphasis of the Revival. We shall be in a good tradition, therefore, if we use this stanza as the source and framework of our examination of this searching question, "When are we alive?"

Unconscious Death

It may be well to note at the beginning that the hymn assumes we may be dead and not know it. "Are we yet alive?" it asks. The closer men live to the simple, ultimate, profound realities of life, the more they know the danger of dying long before the mortician calls for them. Thoreau went to visit William Emerson in New York and his impression of the city is summed up in this sentence: "I walked through New York yesterday—and met no real and living person."¹ This sounds like a hasty generalization, as it no doubt was. Yet a man as sincere

¹ Krutch, *Henry David Thoreau*, Sloane, 1948, 63.

and close to nature as Thoreau, probably sensed the pretense, the hypocrisy, the fear, the insecurity in the faces of the people he passed. One wonders what he would think of the people on the street of a great American city today. I should doubt that he would find any difference. He once wrote a deliberately shocking word to a friend, advising him not to worry about his health because "you may be dead already."² Such a word from some men would be regarded as an effort to be smart and sophisticated, but coming from Thoreau it simply indicated his simple conviction that most men were not really alive.

1. It is not hard to see the truth of this in the intellectual realm. One of the most disturbing things about our contemporary society is to hear men express themselves on economic and political matters with great assurance, yet they have not read a book in either field for twenty-five years. As a matter of fact, outside of their professional magazines and a few detective stories, they have not read anything since they went through *The Rover Boys* on a summer vacation while they were still in the eighth grade. In all the years which have passed, they have not examined a single prejudice or dared to question a single moth-eaten cliché. They can be frightened to death by any man who tells them that the *status quo* is in danger, and they will rally to the support of any demagogue who increases their fears and feeds their pride.

In one of the best of the modern magazine features, Dr. Halford Luccock, who writes under the name of

² *Ibid.*, 275.

"Simeon Stylites," described the average group picture in a newspaper. He pointed out that the names are usually listed below the heading, "Reading from left to right." He went on to remark that this is a description of the way men live—from left to right. They start out with liberal ideas and they move gradually to the position that regards all stability as good and all change as evil. "Wouldn't it be fine," he asked, "if it could be said of some man that he moved from right to left?" Well, it would certainly be remarkable if a man had a more flexible mind as he grew older and showed a greater willingness to doubt his own comfortable assumptions and a greater desire to question the reactionaries. There are a few men who illustrate this principle, which shows it is not impossible, but it is certainly not general. Most of us prefer to rearrange our prejudices and assume that whatever favors our class and our family must be the will of God. How long has it been, we might ask ourselves just as an experiment, since I appropriated a new idea in any relevant realm of experience?

A man will often make excuses for his lack of intellectual vigor and life by saying that he has no time. That is a strange thing to confess, for we waste enough time to read several books a year and we spend time doing inconsequential things which neither amuse us nor benefit us. But what kind of pattern of life have we chosen that forces us to die mentally? Is a man to be merely a victim of hurrying activities which kill his mind? We could well afford to give up many other activities, if necessary,

in order to stay intellectually alive. Perhaps it is time that we seriously considered the state we are in and what we ought to do about it. This is necessary for our own sakes, but it is also necessary for society's sake. The ease with which men can be whipped into a frenzy of panic and fear indicates a lack of serious, cool, objective thinking. This is more of a threat to American democracy than the Russian military divisions.

President John A. Mackay of Princeton Theological Seminary served as a missionary in South America for many years. In one of his books, he mentions seeing a tableau in the Catholic Seminary of Ona, showing the devil holding a microscope in his hand. If this is the spirit of Catholic Christianity in South America, it is utterly contrary to the Protestant interpretation. We do not believe that it is evil to think and investigate. We believe that, if God gave us brains, He must have expected us to use them. The Church does not need to fear thought, but lack of it. If we can get people to think, we have little to fear; but the closed mind and the atrophied intellect are the enemies of God and man. Are we yet alive intellectually is not an academic question but a practical one.

2. The question is a vital one in the aesthetic realm. A former professor of mine told about two men standing on a New England hill in October. That is a sight no one can ever forget and I doubt that even heaven will have scenery more splendid than the flaming woods of Massachusetts in the autumn. One of the men said to his com-

panion, "Wonderful, isn't it?" And the man replied, "It sure is. It ought to cut about so many feet per acre." Ring Lardner, the American humorist, when he first saw the Grand Canyon, said, "What a wonderful place to throw your old razor blades." There is always the danger of getting to the place where only the utilitarian has the power to speak to us. Now the modern art museum seems to me an atrocious arrangement. Most of us are not up to absorbing so much concentrated art in one dose, and as for me, my feet get tired. Probably some such plan is necessary if communities are to keep their art treasures and make them available to the public. But the girl who went through the Metropolitan in thirty minutes, and would have made it in twenty minutes if she had not had on high heels, becomes the symbol of unprepared people trying to cram in a little culture in a hurry.

More important than this, it seems to me, is that each family should deal with the problem of keeping alive an appreciation of the beautiful. We ought to make whatever sacrifice is necessary to have a few beautiful things in our homes. One good picture which symbolizes the painting art at its best will grow increasingly precious to us with the passing years. Music on recordings is not beyond our reach and we ought to take the time to let Beethoven and Bach work their magic on us not once, but often. I do not plead for art experts who have learned a jargon of terms to impress their friends, but for amateurs who have learned to appreciate the best because they love the best.

There is a great text in Jeremiah. He writes: "I will get me unto the great men, and will speak unto them . . ." (Jeremiah 5:5). It is a fine thing to associate with the great men in every field of human endeavor. When this opportunity is before us, why are we content with the pretentious and mediocre? Let us make it our purpose to get unto the great art and let it speak unto us.

During the war, I was minister in a city where a large air base was located. The boys were there for a week or so and then on their way overseas. Often they had little to do and time hung heavy on their hands. There were many who had no desire to get drunk or hang around the dives, but became weary of movies and could think of nothing else to do. We had a good library in our city and many a boy might have had a week or two of reading that would have enriched his life forever. Yet most of them had not learned to read and the very sight of books bored them. There is no greater protection against loneliness and no source of deeper satisfaction than books, but we have to be aware of their promise. It would seem to me the part of practical wisdom to remain alive to great literature.

When William M. Evarts was stricken with a serious eye disease, he went to a specialist for an examination. After it was over, he received the melancholy news that he was going blind and nothing could be done to prevent it. He replied with this simple word: "Then I must go at once to Dresden and see the Sistine Madonna before

it is too late.”³ If perchance my sense of beauty is growing dull and my appreciation for art is dying, I had better hurry to the Creator of beauty before it is too late.

3. We can die morally and not know it, for moral death is usually a matter of gradually getting used to things which at one time shocked us. Familiarity deadens our sensitivity and breeds in us a contempt for the danger hiding under the surface. When men miss the moral way, usually it is not because they choose deliberately to follow the evil way, but they allow themselves to drift imperceptibly away from righteousness.

One did not find any general confession of guilt on the part of the Germans after the war, and indeed one was hard put to find anyone in that battered country who was willing to admit he was to blame. Apparently no one was responsible for the Nazi rise to power and everyone was an innocent bystander. One of the most hopeless things about Germany is the lack of responsibility the average German takes for World War II. One of the current stories says that Hitler's body was found in a Munich alley clutching a note which read, "I was never a Nazi." This can be put down to sheer hypocrisy on the part of the Germans, but I would rather believe that the drift toward the Nazi evil was so gradual that the nation was engulfed before it was fully conscious of what had happened to it. This is not by way of an apology, but merely to point out that the moral degradation of a

³ Quoted by Macartney, *Preaching Without Notes*, Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1946, 43.

people can be accomplished by gradually filling their minds with atrocious things until they become familiar.

This whole generation has become so engulfed in horror stories that they make little impression on us now. The threat to our life is primarily in the moral realm. We are no longer shocked by what we are planning to do to people labeled our "enemies," especially if we keep it all in the field of the general. We become clever at using terms to hide horrible realities, and we do not allow our imaginations to see the individuals back of the mass destruction we plan. It is all a part of the terrible depersonalizing processes which are having their way with us.

I was traveling through a mountain pass in Idaho some time ago, when I saw a dog drag himself painfully across the road. We stopped to see what was the matter and discovered he had been hit and was partially paralyzed. Our car was loaded and he was a big dog. I tried to comfort him and turned to leave but made the mistake of looking back. Did you ever look into a wounded dog's eyes when he thought you were deserting him? I simply could not stand it and I know I am no more sensitive to suffering than you are. We stopped at the first farmhouse to tell them about the dog and get their promise to pick him up. Yet that was only a dog, and we can read almost daily of the horrible things we plan for children who are in the cities we expect to bomb. Our only salvation is to escape from our generalities and see individual human lives at stake if we persist in our plans for World War III. If we were morally alive, we would spend whatever

is necessary to penetrate iron curtains and wage peace with power and intensity. Let us stop drifting further into the darkness and come alive to moral law.

4. But the most serious thing of all is to die spiritually and know it not, for spiritual life is the basis of all life. God is a Spirit and so is man. Because that is true, the essential thing about any society or civilization is its religion. One of my young friends, who has been minister of a congregation engaged in building a new church, was speaking of the enterprise and the reason for beginning it. He said that we build churches because we are sinners and we need a symbol to remind us of the grace of God in our common life. It was such an apt word that I spoke to him about it afterward and he confessed that Paul Tillich said it first and he was paraphrasing it. But whoever said it, you cannot find a better reason for building churches. Men who attend church regularly have not set themselves up as better than other men, but simply are those who have banded themselves together in an endeavor to stay alive spiritually. It is a dangerous thing when men neglect their church attendance, precisely because they are deserting the symbol which reminds them of the grace of God in their own daily lives. With all the business of life crowding in upon us, it is the spiritual side of our nature which gets neglected and dies. The time can come when we simply do not know what men are talking about when they discuss spiritual matters. The only guarantee we have of eternal life lies in the fact

that we are spiritual creatures and not bound by the body's fate. We could face death with less risk in any other sphere than in the realm of the spirit, for to die there means to die eternally.

No man is safe in this respect, and the more holy our calling, the more we can make our spiritual life an empty shell full of vague memories. It is important to have spiritual exercises which we practice every day and regular spiritual stimulation which will keep us alive. Every man will need to find some symbol, some practice, some conspiracy to outwit the creeping paralysis which will bring his spiritual life to an end.

The English actor, Forbes-Robertson, relates that in his London club there was an atheist by the name of Crow. On every occasion he preached his atheism and attacked Christianity. Finally, one of the members put the following lines on the bulletin board:

We've heard in language highly spiced
That Crow does not believe in Christ
But what we're more concerned to know
Is whether Christ believes in Crow.

Quite so! Let me stand constantly under the searching eye of my spiritual Lord and ask how my poor life must appear to him. The only safety is for me to live so close to him that his presence will continually revive my spiritual life. Let us face this terrifying truth about ourselves: in the realms which are truly significant, we can die and know it not.

Signs of Life

Now from all of this we are driven to the conclusion that our main task is to stay alive. How shall we keep from dying intellectually, aesthetically, morally, spiritually? As the small boy said to the lady who believed everything was in one's mind: "My grandfather thought he was dead and we had to bury him." How to keep from the necessity of being buried before our time, is the question. What we need to do, therefore, is to determine the signs of life and search our own beings for those signs. Many a man dies because he never asks himself what he would be like if he were alive.

1. For one thing, growth is a sign of life. This is so simple in the natural world that we give it no conscious thought, but it will be well for us to apply it to our own lives. If a plant puts forth new leaves in the spring, it is alive; and if it does not, it is dead. If a flower blooms in the spring, it is alive; but if it no longer produces blossoms, it is dead. When the winter is past and the grass puts forth its green blades and the trees reach higher with new branches, we know that life has not been conquered by the winter. Life means growth.

If we should apply this to our own lives, we would have to say that if we are not growing any longer, then we are to all intent and purposes, dead. If in any single realm of life I have ceased to grow, then in that realm I have died. When a man wants to freeze the economic system where it is because he is comfortable, let him face

the unpleasant fact that he has died in his economic thinking. When we assume that our democracy has reached perfection and must no longer be enlarged and carried further, then we are dead in our political thinking. When our religious experience seems quite adequate and we are no longer interested in more light and greater spiritual power, it is time to dig the grave and have a brief, sad service over our spiritual corpse. When men stop growing, men are dying.

One of my friends is the most alive man I know because he has a curious mind and is still possessed by a sense of adventure we usually associate with youth. He and his wife once took a vacation by bus. They went to the places which interested them, stopped off for as long as they wished to stay, met people and discovered more unusual things than any guidebook includes. The evening of their return will be long remembered as this man told of strange things he had discovered and new thoughts which came to him. I have never been with him ten minutes but that he did not ask a question about something he was investigating. And he stands in my circle of friends as the most interesting man I know because he assumes that he ought to be expanding his knowledge and growing every day. He does not know what it means to be bored.

The old Conference Minutes of the Methodist Church set down their information by way of question and answer. In the *Minutes* for 1791, I discovered this interesting item:

Question 10: Who have died this year?

Answer: Wyatt Andrews, who died full of faith and the Holy Ghost. As long as he could ride, he travelled; and while he had breath he praised God.

And that is all I know about Wyatt Andrews, but it is enough to make me look forward to meeting him in heaven. I could ask for no finer epitaph for myself than a testimony that as long as I lived I was traveling somewhere. Are we yet alive? Yes, if we are still growing.

2. Another sign of life is response, and we rightly draw the conclusion that life has departed from an object if we can observe no sign of sensitivity to stimuli. General Walter Bedell Smith, our former ambassador to Russia, relates that most of the arrests by the Russian police are made at night when a man may be taken away from his family and never be heard from again. One of the Russian jokes tells of an apartment house janitor who went around knocking on the doors at midnight calling out loudly, "Don't be afraid, comrades, it's only a fire."⁴ Men can get afraid to answer the door to life and then fear has worked like death. When men are afraid to respond to other men, society dies. Too many people are living behind their closed doors, terrified lest someone knock.

Spring comes not according to the calendar always, but according to a man's response. There is a day when something new is in the air—an indefinable promise—and, regardless of the date, spring has announced her arrival. If the time should come when a man's heart did

⁴Smith, *My Three Years in Moscow*, Lippincott, 1949, 123.

not leap up within him at the promise of another summer, he should consult a healer. The nature poets are rightly scornful of the kind of life which can kill this response, for they know that a part of the man is dead when nature can call and he does not answer.

The same is true of human need. The devastation of the wars of our time is not primarily in buildings, but in our power to be moved by human suffering. We have seen too much and we have heard too much, until a suffering person is just part of the newspaper stories. To sit for an hour with an official of the International Refugee Organization and hear what has happened to millions of human beings in our time, makes one wonder if it is too late to find enough sensitive human beings to build a decent society across the world. When a man has trained himself to be unresponsive to the need of a brother, let him not be glad that he is so practical and wise. Let him bewail the fact that he has entered the first stages of death.

How responsive Jesus was! He was so popular at feasts that his enemies called him a winebibber and a glutton. Where people were having a good time, Jesus added to their joy. He began his public ministry in the Fourth Gospel, at a marriage feast in Cana. But he was just as responsive to human sorrow. Remember Martha's word to Jesus after her brother's death: "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died" (John 11:21). She had the feeling that Jesus would have responded to their need with some mighty work of healing. The One who

was the Lord of Life and who stands as the symbol of what real life is, was most responsive to the life about him.

It is the plan of the devil to kill this Christian responsiveness. As a contemporary Christian puts it:

If a man travels far enough away from Christianity he is always in danger of seeing it in perspective and deciding that it is true. It is much safer, from Satan's point of view, to vaccinate a man with a mild case of Christianity, so as to protect him from the real thing.⁵

The Church is full of vaccinated Christians who are now immune to the real thing and are no longer able to respond to Christ's call. The result is a vain attempt on the part of the Church to do Christ's work with half-dead Christians.

3. Finally, let it be said that to remain alive means we have to be in conscious relationship with God, who is the source of life. It is not too much to say that the man who is cut off from his God is not really alive. There is a great word for us in the 40th Psalm:

I waited patiently for the Lord; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. (1-2)

The expression "waited patiently" is translated from the Hebrew word which means "bound together." The man who is alive is bound together with God and thus he is replenished constantly with God's life.

⁵ Walsh, *Early Christians of the 21st Century*, Harper, 1949, 11.

Life is relationship, and the man who withdraws from his fellows, dies. The isolated hermit is not really alive, and the man who would live has to maintain his personal relations. This will lead him to God and eternal life, which is not something to wait for, but something to enter here and now. It means life that is lived within the fellowship of God. Chesterton wrote:

They should not hear a word from me
Of selfishness or scorn
If only I could find the door
If only I were born.⁶

We recall Jesus' warning that we must be born again, which is to say, we must be born into eternal life—the life of relationship with God. We are not yet alive until this has been our experience.

There was a period in the French Revolution known as the Reign of Terror. It was a period of hysteria and panic when the revolutionists killed even their friends. The Abbé Sieyès, who had been a friend of the poor, was forced to hide during this time and was fortunate to survive. After it was over, someone asked him what he did during the Terror, and he replied grimly, "I stayed alive." Life is always a dangerous adventure and a man is in constant danger of sacrificing his life for safety. Our only protection is to stand always under the searching questions: Are we growing? Are we responsive? Do we

⁶ "By the Babe Unborn," from *The Wild Knight* by G. K. Chesterton. Reprinted by permission of the Estate of G. K. Chesterton and A. P. Watt & Son.

know God? For the central problem facing us in our short journey on the earth is the problem of staying alive, but the Christian need not fear if he but keep close to the one who said, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (John 10:10).

III

Why Am I A Christian?

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised. . . . LUKE 4:18

As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world.—JOHN 17:18

The story of Jesus' return to his home town to preach strikes a responsive note in the heart of every preacher and every layman, for most of us have either been in pulpit or pew on similar occasions. While our experiences have not been as violent as the conclusion of that morning service in Nazareth many years ago, we have felt the tensions and recognized the problems. It does not take too much imagination to enter into this experience of our Lord.

At the beginning, everything went well, no doubt. He was a fine young man with an excellent voice and a most pleasing personality. He had a great text—one of

the most familiar, from one of the greatest of the prophets. One can almost see the members of the congregation settling down for a good sermon and a pleasant period of quiet. "This," they said to themselves, "is going to be all right." Then everything went wrong. For the young preacher did not come to the usual banal conclusion but shook them awake with his quiet comment: "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears" (Luke 4:21). And as he went on to explain what he meant, they became ever more angry until they would have thrown him over a cliff if he had not escaped from them.

I have considered their anger and I have decided it was aroused primarily for two reasons. In the first place, they could not believe that the spirit of the Lord would be on someone they knew. This young man who had grown up among them and was the son of their neighbors must certainly be suffering from delusions of grandeur if he thought Isaiah meant him. We can hardly ever believe that the boy next door is a genius or that the man in the next block may be a leader in his field. Thus when it was reported that the Wright brothers had flown an airplane at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, one of their neighbors in Dayton, Ohio, said: "I don't believe it. Nobody's ever going to fly; and if anybody did fly, it wouldn't be anyone from Dayton."¹

But the main cause of their anger was Jesus' announcement that he intended something definite. His teaching was not to remain vague and general, which meant that

¹ Sockman, *The Higher Happiness*, Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1950, 156.

he had come to waken people to their specific obligations to God. If this kept up, then people would be uncomfortable and perhaps they might even be driven to sacrifice. There was a good chance that such a religion would upset established orders. They had a sure instinct which told them that such teaching was dangerous and such preachers were not safe men. They took what seemed the easy way to a solution—they became angry and drove him from their midst.

We have not changed very much in nineteen hundred years. For the vast majority of Christians, religion remains a hopelessly vague affair. Ask the average church member what it means to be a Christian and you will soon see that it does not mean anything precise. He will probably murmur something about the golden rule, or list a few negative virtues, but he will show no sense of mission. We argue definitions and we discuss academic questions about conscience, but we seldom proclaim that as Christians we have been sent to do specific things. Sometimes it seems that the people who can be exact in their philosophy are only the so-called practical men who have dedicated their talents to looking after themselves. Science needs more spiritual guidance and Christians need more scientific exactness. As Finley Peter Dunn once said, "If Christian Scientists had more science and doctors more Christianity it wouldn't make any difference which you called in—if you had a good nurse."

It is time we asked what it means to be a Christian and why we are Christians. The power of Gandhi was in

his ability to see exactly what had to be done next. His achievements came about not by way of glittering generalities spoken about vague spiritual principles, but by actions based on spiritual insight and faith. He can teach Christians a great deal in this field. For us, we must turn back to Jesus and find out what he conceived his task to be. There is no clearer statement than the program he announced in Nazareth when he read from Isaiah. It must follow then inevitably that we are to imitate him or, as the Fourth Gospel says it, he expects to send us forth to do what God had sent him forth to do. Let us, then, think about these things.

Good News to the Poor

First of all, the Christian program is to preach good news to the poor. This is to say that the Christian is always concerned for the welfare of his brethren, even as Jesus made the service of men the center of his ministry. The Church can easily forget this central thing, but it is being brought back constantly by the saints who appear often enough to keep it before us. Remember the beginning of the Salvation Army. A Methodist preacher stood on the streets of London's East End section and watched people caught in poverty, vice and filth. He says that the time came when he "hungered for hell." Here was the arena for a Christian to work, and he went home to inform his wife that he had dedicated his life and hers and the children's to the service of the poor. She smiled and took his hand as together they knelt and

prayed. That was the beginning of the Army and the career of William Booth. It would be a good thing if every church would learn that it is unwise to push outside the programs which may not fit the denominational pattern or the official procedure. It is a sad day for the Christian Church when men like William Booth are made to feel unwelcome.

The true Christian sees people differently than the man of the world describes them. St. Francis did not think of the poor man as one who lacked riches, but he pitied the rich man as one who lacked humility. There is a strange reversal of values when men see their fellows through the eyes of Christ, and the farther we go from him, the greater the contrast between the New Testament viewpoints and ours. Think of those twelve disciples! Many a church today would not admit them to its ministry. They lacked the educational requirements, for one thing; they were too old and some of the fishermen probably smelled badly. You could hardly choose a more unpromising lot, but Jesus saw in them men who, if they had their chance, would build the foundation for the greatest fellowship the world has ever seen. Paul had to confess that the early Christians were not the most prominent men in the community. Yet, one has the feeling that he does not feel dejected about this, but rather rejoices that men discarded by their society found a place in the Church.

One can observe how far removed from this preaching good news to the poor we are when a modern sect

talks about reaching "key" people. There was not a key person to be found among those whom Jesus called first to follow him. We must confess that the Church has become, to a large degree, a middle-class institution, valuing respectability more than virtue. We must confess that our religious attitudes have become altogether too much colored with worldly attitudes. When this happens, we cannot escape being merely a champion of things as they are, and fearing anything which might threaten the social lines approved by our communities. Let us keep going back to Nazareth and hear our Lord say, "I have come to preach good news to the poor."

This is not to assume that a Christian has a prejudice against the rich, as such. The Christian view seems to me to recognize the dangers of wealth and it warns against those dangers. I do not think it is inevitably committed to equal incomes and I am sure it does not favor general poverty. But it is committed to looking on men as ends in themselves and it must regard each man, regardless of social or economic status, as of eternal worth. Its good news is to men as men and its main social question is, what do men need and how can we fill their need? Jesus is not inevitably on the side of the poor, but he is usually on their side so far as the New Testament record is concerned, because they are usually the main victims of injustice and are most in need. The man who can see his fellows only between the blinders of his own class and condition is not yet a true Christian. He will have to

learn how to enter into his brother's suffering with his imagination and see his brother as God sees him.

A French prime minister facing a serious operation said to the surgeon, "You will not, of course, treat me with the same rough manner you treat the charity wretches in your hospital." The surgeon, who was a Christian, answered, "Sir, these poor miserable wretches, as your Eminence is pleased to call them, are all prime ministers in my eyes." I am a Christian because I have been called to bear witness to the truth that all men are equal in the eyes of God, in the eyes of Jesus Christ, and in my eyes. I have been commissioned to preach this good news to all men, but especially to the poor.

Release to the Captives

Jesus was not speaking in a prison and trying to comfort men behind stone walls and iron bars. He was speaking to men who had the usual constraints of society on them, as well as the humiliation of being a province of the Roman Empire. They were probably not quite so free as we are, but in a day when international tensions force our government to interfere with both our public and private affairs, there was no tremendous difference between that day and this. At any rate, Jesus was not speaking primarily of political freedom nor was he describing an anarchical society. He was talking about freedom from the prisons we build for ourselves and the chains we forge for our own wearing. There is no captivity so serious and hopeless as the one we create out

of our own ignorance and fear. To these captives, and that means to all men, the Gospel comes to proclaim release and, as a Christian, I ought to be a freeing agent in my community.

Christianity sets men free from their ignorance and their prejudice. The whole history of the Church has been a story of the founding of educational institutions to enlarge men's minds. It ought not to be forgotten that Christianity is the mother of education and that the great universities of the Middle Ages were founded under the guidance of the Medieval Church. Now and again a group of Christians makes it a virtue to be ignorant or list certain books on an Index. There have appeared from time to time men who thought they served God by pronouncing a curse on new knowledge, but such men only betray how easy it is to mistake one's own ignorance for God's will.

The Christian has a wider view of the universe than any other man, for he has a more profound experience of God. He has the most sweeping horizons, for nothing is either to be regarded as unclean or to be ignored. A narrow, bigoted, mean Christian is a contradiction of terms, and if the Gospel does not create kindness, sympathy and faith, it has been misunderstood. As a Christian, I am to break down the social and racial fears of men and eliminate the stupid regulations we hold in order to bolster up our pride. I am to cut straight across the lines and help men to meet as men and not as members of particular vested interests. Men need to be saved from

the prisons their societies encourage them to build, and they need to be freed from their narrow thoughts. If Christians are not proclaiming release to such captives as these, let them ask if this is not what their Lord did and commanded his followers to continue doing.

What a center of wickedness and vice the human personality can be! The newspapers are sources for the study of sex crimes and perversions. Yet you might meet such a person on the street and never recognize him, for this seething evil within does not always have outer stigma. We arrest such people and sometimes we execute them, but we do not know how to release them, and sometimes, humanly speaking, we cannot release them. But, while few of us are so bad that we must be committed to institutions, we are the prisoners of impulses and evil inclinations which make us ashamed and desperate. What man among us would want his neighbors to know all the dark thoughts he entertains? For our own self-respect, it is a good thing that God does not make our minds transparent. What hope is there for us except that God should do for us what we cannot do for ourselves, and set us free from the prison house of our own uncontrolled impulses? I am a Christian because God in Christ promises me and all men power enough to live nobly. There is hardly any experience more wonderful than learning that the wild and fearful evil which runs loose in a man's heart can be controlled and a man may be set free from its rule.

In our time, a great testimony has been offered by Alcoholics Anonymous. We are reluctant to confess our

failures in dealing with the disease of alcoholism, but out of a very limited experience I am ready to believe that nothing else but the power of God can be relied on to cure. This is not to discount psychology and all the new skills we have developed in diagnosing and treating the human mind. But a faithless psychology has remarkably little lasting influence, and when it comes to the creation of new men, there has been discovered no substitute for God. The Church needs a rebirth of confidence in its spiritual power to transform life. There has been given to every Christian the authority to proclaim release to the captives of evil habits.

We are to be aware of a divine commission to heal the sick. Long before our modern medicine became aware of the close relation between the body and the soul, Jesus was practicing what has come to be called *psychosomatic medicine*. The Church can be proud of its long record of healing and its many hospitals. One of the most amazing developments of modern times is the medical missionary with his dedication to the healing of sick bodies in the name of Jesus. It is something unique in religion that men should be concerned with release from physical pain, and it is indicative of Christianity's practical viewpoint.

But it was Jesus' emphasis on the close interdependence of body and mind that we either neglect or make futile by carrying too far. On the one hand, there are those who accept an outdated materialism which believes there is some physical cure for every human ill. On the other hand, there are those who deny all the

science and technique of the medical profession as if it were any the less a work of God. The Christian will not despise science, but he will be aware of its limitations and he will know that the root of many a modern's sickness is in the spirit. We have hardly gone beneath the surface in our comprehension of the power of faith and prayer, and we are only beginning to comprehend the releasing power of the religion of Jesus Christ.

The need is to get out of ourselves and be released from the narrow boundaries of our own egos. All of us are too much like the author who had been spending too much time telling a group about his own greatness and his many achievements. Finally he paused for a moment and said, "But enough of talking about myself. Let us talk about you. What do you think of my latest book?" As someone once said, many a preacher stops too soon in his reading of II Timothy 2:15, so that he comes up with this: "Study to show thyself. . . ." One of the most marvelous things Christ does for us is to release us from our own little selves. Strangely enough, when once the miracle has been wrought and we are free men, we discover that our prisons were of our own building. I am a Christian because a Christian can be released from his captivity, and when that has taken place, he becomes a freeing agent for his brethren.

Recovery of Sight

The healing miracles of Jesus have been subjects of long and sometimes bitter debate. A scientific generation

has little patience with matters unprovable and often dismisses them as of little importance because they are an embarrassment. It is easy enough to dismiss all the miracles in the Bible if one assumes that miracles contradict reason and are therefore impossible. There was a time in seminary when I knew all the answers to these questions. (You should have known me then.) But the passing years have made me much less sure of my conclusions and much less dogmatic concerning what is possible and what is not. It grows on me constantly that, if you have a person like Jesus about, you will have miracles taking place; that as a matter of fact, it would have been much more astounding if there had been no mighty works and no unexplainable happenings. I find myself repeating a phrase in an old hymn with trustfulness: "He healed the broken-hearted, and made the blind to see."

However, we need not labor this point, for it is certainly true that God has taught men how to make many of the blind to see. I was in a mission hospital some time ago and was escorted about by the doctor in charge. We entered a darkened room in which there was a small native boy with bandages over his eyes. The doctor introduced us and told me about him. He had been stricken with an eye disease when he was three years old and now he was seven. Someone thought that perhaps the mission doctor could do something for him and he was brought to the hospital. After a series of treatments, an operation was performed and two days before, in a darkened room, the little boy had been able to see the

dim outlines of objects. "Now we know," said the doctor, "that the operation was a success and he will have his sight restored." During the time we were talking, I watched the boy's face and there came upon it such a smile of joy and such a light as never was on sea or land. I thought to myself that, if this were the only thing that mission hospital ever accomplished, it was well worth the cost. The Church through the years has been bringing recovery of sight to the blind.

Yet it should be maintained that a greater miracle than the recovery of sight to blind eyes is the recovery of sight to blind hearts. We meet people who literally are unable to see their brothers because of hatred and pride. There is no sense in talking to them about brotherhood until a miracle to restore their sight can be performed. The blind man who cannot see the sun is no more in need of an operation than the man who cannot see the light of God in the face of racial or social minorities. Men cannot be forced to accept what they cannot see, and sometimes we try to storm the citadels of prejudice when we ought to be patient instruments in the hands of God, opening blind eyes and letting in the light. When enemies are reconciled and brotherhood is established across the barriers men have built, let us never doubt that we are in the presence of miracle and Jesus is repeating his ancient ministry of bringing recovery of sight to the blind. To be a Christian is to be a part of this process of eliminating blindness.

An executive committee of the community chest was

meeting in an American city. One of the reports was an exposé of the manner in which some of the derelicts along the waterfront were obtaining money from one of the social agencies and spending it for liquor. There was a wave of righteous indignation that rolled across the meeting that these ungrateful beggars were treating city charity in such a way. This had to stop and something drastic done about it. Then one of the men spoke quietly: "I do not condone it," he said, "but I'm troubled at the anger this has caused. A few days ago, one of our members of the board of directors was indicted for income tax evasion, which ran into thousands of dollars. A few months ago, one of the respected leaders of the community committed suicide because his accounts were short at the bank. Neither of those things roused the anger and indignation which these poor, lost, defeated men have created. Yet their misappropriation of funds has been pennies compared to thousands of dollars in the two cases just mentioned. Does respectability justify crime, while loss of all social status magnifies it?" At least one member of that group was ashamed of himself because his eyes were opened to his own blindness, and that was a healing miracle too.

O. Henry, who wrote such marvelous short stories, was born in Greensboro, North Carolina, but he became a confirmed New Yorker. He said once that all he wanted was a steam-heated flat with no ventilation and no exercise. When he was dying, he spoke these last words to the nurse: "Pull up the shades so I can see New

York. I don't want to go home in the dark." And in our dark world we need to pray that God in Christ will take away the shades from our minds and spirits that the light of the Holy City may shine upon us and guide us. We stumble down the dark road to destruction because we cannot see. What a great thing it is to know that One still walks the roads of our life "to bring recovering of sight to the blind."

To Set at Liberty

Finally, Jesus announced that he had come to save the oppressed from their oppressions. We have tried to stress the example of our Lord, and that is important, but at the heart of the Christian experience there is not an example but a savior: You cannot divorce the faith of the Christian from works, but you must never begin with the works, for they are results and not causes. Until our hearts are cleansed, we cannot produce clean actions. A man once asked Sir James Simpson, the great Scottish surgeon, what he considered his greatest discovery. The questioner expected it would be something in the scientific realm—probably one of the doctor's contributions to medicine. But the answer was: "My greatest discovery is that I am a great sinner and that Jesus is a great Savior."² That is the chief revelation which comes to any man and it is the most precious possession of the Christian.

² Straton, *Preaching the Miracles of Jesus*, Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1950, 192.

He sets us at liberty from our fears. Most men are afraid, sometimes of things they recognize, but usually of unseen, hazily analyzed terrors which creep in on them the moment they are off guard. Not the least thing which Jesus did for the disciples was to rescue them from their fears, though it was not until after the Resurrection that some of them, like Peter, escaped their oppression. No one ever comes to know Jesus Christ without being convinced that God is concerned for his life, and no man's life can ever be the same if he believes that underneath him there are the everlasting arms. No man can ever be afraid of the future, as he once was, if he knows it is in the hands of God. Doubt and fear are closely allied and the conquest of faith creates confidence.

He sets us at liberty from the oppression of loneliness. I doubt if any generation has been more a victim of isolation and the fear that comes from it than ours. The cities of America and of the world are full of people who are nearly desperate because of their aloneness. They are unrelated with any living fellowship and true friendship is not a part of their experience. They meet people who are acquaintances, but they do not know one single person to whom they confess their loneliness and their fright. They have the haunting certainty that no one really cares for them, and if any disaster overtook them, no one would share their sorrow. Old age is a specter which shadows their footsteps and rather than being a promise of rest for work well done, it threatens them with an increasing loneliness which they wonder

if they can bear. It is sad travesty on our civilization that, at the moment it provides the most amusement and glitter, it creates the most emptiness of spirit.

It is for the Christian to help set these people at liberty. It is for the Church to remember that it is not primarily an institution, but a fellowship—indeed, the only real fellowship left. A British government publication in 1919 said that “Gandhi’s readiness to take up the cudgels on behalf of any individual or class whom he regarded as being oppressed, has endeared him to the masses of the country.”³ Let the Church learn that this is the way to earn the affection of the masses too, and set about lifting the oppression of fear.

The Gospel is to set men free from social injustice and corporate slavery. In a day when the comfortable are afraid of change, there is terrific pressure to silence the prophetic voice of the Church and silence the social concern of Jesus. When Christians begin to prefer the *status quo* over justice, they have lost sight of one significant part of their purpose. When we begin to hint that the Kingdom of God is synonymous with any economic or political system, we only betray our complete misunderstanding of the Gospel. As long as there is discrimination and an unfair distribution of the burdens of society, our Lord will expect us to be there fighting for the righting of those wrongs. The Christian has the advantage over other men in that he can ignore labels and go through smoke screens to the heart of the human

³ Fischer, *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi*, Harper, 1950, 185.

situation. For under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, he follows the path of justice and righteousness, not only in his own life, but in his society.

Why am I a Christian? Because Jesus Christ has preached good news to the poor and commissioned me, who am very poor, to preach to my brethren that good news. Because he has released me from my captivity and sent me forth to release all men. Because he has opened my blind eyes and given me the power to bring recovering sight to the unseeing. Because he has set me at liberty from my oppressions and called me to be a freeing influence for everyone. He has brought me Life.

Oscar Hammerstein, who wrote the lyrics for *Oklahoma*, tells about how he came to write the opening song. The musical was adapted from Lynn Riggs' play *Green Grow the Lilacs*, and these stage directions were set down for the opening scene:

It is a radiant summer morning several years ago. The kind of morning which, enveloping the shapes of earth—men, cattle in the meadow, blades of the young corn, streams—makes them seem to exist now for the first time, their images giving off a visible golden emanation that is partly true and partly a trick of imagination, focusing to keep alive a loveliness that may pass away.

On the basis of that, Hammerstein, thinking it a shame to waste such words on mere stage directions, wrote that wonderful song, "Oh, What a Beautiful Mornin'."⁴ And that is what Jesus does for Christians. He changes

⁴ Hammerstein, *Saturday Review of Literature*, December 3, 1949.

the prosaic rules of ethics into a new song which has marching power and fills the heart with joy. It is this golden extra, this unspeakable glory, which makes Christians certain that, in Christ, God has given them His best.

IV

Which Way To Peace?

Can two walk together, except they be agreed? AMOS 3:3
And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.
MATTHEW 5:41

These two texts seem to contradict each other, for the obvious answer which Amos has in mind to his question is "No." He implies that such an answer is inevitable, for when people walk side by side, their agreement is as obvious as sunlight. But Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount speaks of walking with a man under compulsion, not grudgingly or bitterly, but gladly. He seems to assume that it is possible for men to walk together when they are not agreed.

Now these two ideas are not so much contradictions as they are approaches to life on different levels. There are joys which can come only to like-minded people. There is a camaraderie known only to people whose minds meet and whose temperaments are in harmony. We have

known these experiences and they are among our most precious possessions. But the real problem is how to walk with men when we are not in agreement with them, and we face this situation more often than the other. A French political leader remarked that whenever three Frenchmen meet there are four political parties, and the French are not alone in this tendency. The occasions of perfect agreement and perfect harmony are rare, and if a man will walk with another only under those conditions, he will walk alone most of the time. It is not the comrade who sees eye to eye with us who represents our difficulty, but the man we have to live with whose outlook is not only different, but at times loathsome.

One of America's fine public servants defined his faith in the democratic way in these words:

One of the most beautiful phrases in our language are the words an American uses when he says to those with whom he has been in disagreement: "I'll go along with you. That's not the way I see it, but I'll go along." Out of this percept of reasonableness and respect for the opinions of others often issues one of the finest fruits of thought: a composite judgment, the product of many minds.

The considered judgment of men who reason together embodies more than "tolerance," which is, after all, a somewhat thin and negative concept. It is rather based on an affirmative belief in the value of blending diverse experiences, diverse backgrounds. Such a composite or group judgment can be sturdier than any one of the individual judgments that make it up. This harmonizing of conflicting views into a common conclusion is not merely the trader's "splitting the difference"; it is not compromise for its own sake. It is a doctrine in exact contradiction to the growing

fanaticism and dogmatism in the world, in which differences from an official party line are dealt with as traitorous and in which the accommodation of conflicting ideas is regarded as a sign of weakness rather than what it is in fact: a mark of strength.¹

This problem, always difficult, is particularly acute in our time. We know now that mere proximity does not create understanding and the shrinking of the world is no guarantee of peace. This belief, once held by many a liberal, appears to be very naïve just now; for decent relations between men of differing views appear to be possible only when both hold a fundamental faith in the ultimate value of every man. We have mistaken results for causes and assumed that distance was the enemy instead of pride. A man has to be a certain kind of person before he can "go along" with another. What Mr. Lilienthal has said above seems to me true as far as it goes. What he does not say, however, and what must never be ignored is that this American faith was created by the Judeo-Christian heritage and it cannot be maintained very long if its roots are pulled out of that soil. It is this truth which provides the sign pointing the direction men must travel if they would find peace in our time.

The Struggle for the World

It is easy to oversimplify the issues at stake in the struggles of our time, but the root of the trouble between Totalitarianism and Democracy is the question of con-

¹ Lilienthal, *This I Do Believe*, Harper, 1949, 35.

formity. The totalitarians, whether of the right or the left, believe that strength means rigidity of social patterns. Or to put it in the thought of Amos, they believe that men cannot walk together unless they are agreed, or at least are made afraid to disagree. So they make difference of opinion the chief sin against the state and criticism of the government a capital offense. They establish their secret police to make men afraid of expressing their own ideas even to their most intimate friends. As far as it is possible, the totalitarians establish thought control. In the long run they dare not admit the right of any other system to exist, for any free society is a constant threat to them. The threat does not lie only in a possible military attack by such a society, but in the fact that freedom reminds men of their heritage in God and makes the slaves restless.

Democracy stands for the idea of unity in loyalty to certain great principles, but nonconformity in all else. The citizen of a free society must be committed to the rule of the majority and obedience to the law, but he has a right, rather a duty, to oppose the government and the laws if he thinks they are wrong. His opposition, however, must not be exercised by guns, but by ballots. He must believe that two can walk together when they are not in agreement and, as a member of the minority, he may walk under compulsion. Yet, he must do it gracefully and in co-operation until he succeeds in persuading a majority to his way of thinking. This is the essence of democracy.

In England, Clement Atlee, whose party was not in power, once said to a group of Americans that, while he was the kind of person who would always have to kick Chamberlain whenever possible, the government paid him a salary to do it, for he was at that time the leader of "His Majesty's loyal opposition." (What a wonderful phrase.) It is that spirit which has been one of the great contributions the British have made to the world, and the reason so much of our democratic spirit and tradition have their roots in that Island.

Now what is the verdict of history as to the relative strength of these two views? It seems to me overwhelmingly in favor of democracy as being not only closer to human nature and the moral law, but more enduring. Consider those two rival city-states of Greece, Sparta and Athens. Sparta chose the way of totalitarians and made herself into an armed camp. Her boys were trained to be soldiers and the social patterns were made rigid and compulsory. Sparta died and her contribution to the culture of the world is amazingly small. Athens, on the other hand, developed a spirit of nonconformity so that the very name "Athenian" came to signify one who liked to argue and a person interested in hearing any new idea. Here was the friendly environment which produced philosophy and enthroned reason. Athens never died for she bequeathed her life to Western civilization and, along with Israel, was a parent of the culture we call our own.

Even Rome, with all of its ruthlessness, was amazingly tolerant of local custom and religion. The Pax Romana

was possible because a rigid sameness was not insisted on in all parts of the empire. The fear of difference is not a strength, but a weakness. It is a desperate attempt to bolster up a failing government and it has within it the seeds of its own destruction. Perhaps more than anything else right now, we need to take the long look and then have more faith in our free way of nonconformity, for we shall find ample evidence that it is the way which leads to the future.

I stood one day in St. Paul's Cathedral, London, and read the inscription by the grave of Sir Christopher Wren, who designed the Cathedral: "Sir Christopher Wren. If you would see his monument, look about you." I remembered that delightful story of his conflict with the City Fathers of Windsor. He had been employed to build the great Corn Market and presented a design which showed no pillars holding up the roof. He said they would not be needed, but the Fathers could not conceive of such a thing and insisted on pillars. Finally, the architect yielded and agreed to give them pillars, though he still insisted they were not necessary. But some time afterward it was found that he had won after all, for he made the pillars one half inch shorter than the roof. There they stand, but they serve no useful purpose, for the roof has never sagged. Which is a parable! There are those who insist that we can only build the temple of society with the rigid forms of tyrannical control to hold it up, but there are others who believe that the temple can be constructed on the principle of the

right to personal differences and freedom. That is what democracy believes, and history says democracy is right.

America

One of the finest expressions of our essential American spirit comes from a speech delivered by Dr. Raymond Fosdick, formerly president of the Rockefeller Foundation. Said he:

This is what our democracy has always meant. We have given it its pre-eminent place in the world because we have welcomed diversity of opinion, because there has been no fixed creed to which our citizens have had to subscribe, no Siberia for our intellectual and spiritual non-conformists. Our national life has been healthy and vigorous because dissenters have been encouraged to think critically of the political, social, and economic order in which we live.

Indeed, as we look back on our history we realize that the periods when we rose to moral greatness were periods of non-conformity—when Thoreau wrote his essay on civil disobedience; when Seward appealed to the country with his revolutionary thesis, "There is a law higher than the Constitution"; when Theodore Parker from his pulpit in Boston denounced the iniquity of our war on Mexico in words that burned their way into the conscience of the nation. "If there is any fixed star in our Constitutional constellation," said the Supreme Court in the *Barnette* flag-salute case in 1943, "it is that no official, high or petty, can prescribe what shall be orthodox in politics, nationalism, religion, or other matters of opinion, or force citizens to confess by word or act their faith therein."

Which is to say, America has believed that people can walk together and be different.

I once assumed that the idea of secession was a

Southern product entirely, but that is not quite true. Before the Civil War, William Lloyd Garrison and Wendell Phillips, the abolitionist leaders of New England, seriously suggested secession as the only answer to the slavery problem. They had given up hope of convincing the South that slavery must go, and concluded that the only answer for New England, was to secede from the rest of the country. They seriously suggested this solution. You would be hard put to find a man who would say it was too bad that neither New England nor the South had their way. This is not to say that all sectional differences have been eliminated—far from it. The North irritates the South and the South is often difficult for the North to understand. The West upsets the East and the East makes the West angry. Of course, Washington irritates everybody. But we have learned how to walk together in national unity though we are often far from agreement. This is the greatness and the glory of America.

To put it crudely, our faith is that more than 50 per cent of the people will be right more than 50 per cent of the time. We have assumed that freedom is our fundamental idea, but freedom can mean such different things to different people. It is more true to say that responsibility is the essential assumption of our way. The minority accepts the responsibility to go along with the majority in co-operation until by peaceful methods it can persuade enough people of the rightness of its position and thus becomes the majority. But when that happens, then it must accept the responsibility of observing and preserving the rights of the minority.

There have been times in the past when we have forgotten this responsibility and we have been ashamed of it ever after. Americans have gone into periods of panic and hysteria when they brought home the gods of their enemies and sought to fight the totalitarians by becoming like them. These have never been our periods of national greatness, and when we have come to ourselves, we have repudiated such action. If we deny any minority, whether it be racial, social or ideological, perfect freedom and dignity, we are denying our own faith. Our economy cannot be put into a strait jacket for, being a practical people, we use the method which seems to promise the best results in a particular situation. Thus we have private power companies, and public-owned utilities. We send our telegrams through a private corporation, but we send our mail through the government-owned postal service. Our education is administered by the community, and our health has been administered under a system of free enterprise. Ours is a way of life which prizes results more than consistency. Let us remember that it has made a great nation and judge it by what it has produced. The time has not come yet to substitute conformities and orthodoxies for our liberties.

We have had enough, indeed too much, of men who would sow distrust among us for the sake of political advantage. The politician who attacks his opponent by endeavoring to assassinate his character without any substantiation is a man whose spiritual home is Russia, and not America. We have thrown the word "communist" about so indiscriminately that it no longer has any real

meaning and has become a substitute for thought and the facing of issues. The word of a Harvard professor may help just now:

Thus Communists form $1/20$ of 1 percent of all the people in our country. The odds are 1,999 to 1 in favor of free institutions. Suppose the Harvard Stadium filled with 40,000 people. The chances are that 20 of them would be Communists and 39,980 would not. . . . What can we do to prevent them from harming the other 99.5 percent of us who have on our side only the city and state police, the F.B.I., the Army, the Air Force, and the Navy, never forgetting the Marines . . . Shades of Valley Forge and Iwo Jima! If we no longer want to be the land of the free, let us at least be the home of the brave.²

The danger is to forget from whence comes our strength and our security. In the conflict with the Communist tyranny, the thing America should fear most is that tyranny shall become our way, in the name of fighting against it. Let us have done with the infamous doctrine of guilt by association and trial by headline. Let us believe that our great defense is the unity which is created by the faith of our people in each man's dignity and freedom.

The Church

If you allow a man the right to think, he may come to some conclusion which is dangerous or at least silly. One can never be sure what the outcome will be when men are encouraged to think their own thoughts, as we Protestants have discovered when we have insisted on every

² Chafee, *Bulletin of the American Association of University Professors*, 1949, xxxv, 404-5.

man's right to read the Scriptures and interpret them. Of course, there are some people who insist that men ought not to think, especially in the realm of religion, but simply accept the dogmas handed down from above. I heard of an ignorant preacher who said God did not want men to think and he could prove it from Scripture. "Does it not say," he asked, "in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of man cometh'?" Most of us will not be too much impressed with that argument.

The Reformation was an insistence on the right of individual Christians to their own beliefs. The Protestant movement through the years has been a free outflowing of religious experience and insight. It has resulted in some disgraceful episodes and some futile endeavor, but its strength has far exceeded its weakness. We have not always practiced tolerance toward one another, but we cannot long escape the conclusion that tolerance is not only a possibility but a demand of our claim to freedom in Christ. We move closer together and we develop each year an increasing appreciation for one another. I would not vote to make every Christian in America a Methodist, if I had the power. (The country could not stand it.) For as an individual Christian, the heritage of the Catholics, the Presbyterians, the Baptists, the Lutherans, the Congregationalists and all the different communions means too much to me personally. All of these streams have enriched my life and they have enriched the world's life.

We can too easily assume that our differences spell

weakness only, when they actually spell strength. It is a disgraceful thing if denominations become competitors and bitter rivals, but thank God we are seeing less and less of that sort of thing. I do not desire one organic Protestant church, however, because we could no more keep from being corrupted by too much power than do our Catholic brethren. We have chosen the path of walking together though we are not in complete agreement, rather than accepting the authoritarian way, and I am in no mood to try another road.

The rising tension between Protestants and Catholics in this country is a cause for concern. In a time when we need the power of unity, it is a sad thing that Christians have to oppose one another, instead of joining their forces in an all-out attack on secularism. What is the issue between us which makes it imperative for men of good will and tolerance to speak out against the Church which is the mother of us all? It is not theological, so far as Protestants are concerned at least, for we have Protestant sects as conservative and as medieval as Catholicism. It is not the doctrine of the infallibility of the Pope, unless it be insisted that everyone has to accept it, for we are willing that any group of Christians may believe this if they so desire. It is not even the promulgation of the Assumption of Mary, though most Protestants think it is silly to set this forth seriously as needful for salvation when it has no Scriptural foundation whatsoever.

We American Protestants have come to the conclusion at last that Catholics do not mean the same thing we

mean when they talk about freedom. We hear them say that error does not have the same rights as truth, which sounds reasonable enough, until it is insisted that the Pope must decide who has the truth and who is in error. That leaves us cold. We have seen too many places where the Catholic Church with political power has denied freedom to our Evangelical brethren. This is not to say that Protestants have been guiltless in this respect, but at least they can be challenged on the basis of their own heritage and faith. The Catholic lust for political power in America seems to us to be repeating an old, old pattern and, reluctantly, we have come to the conclusion that it must now be opposed. Yet I believe that, if the Pope would announce unequivocally that whenever the Catholic Church comes into majority power it will insist on absolute freedom to any religious group and any church, the tension could be eliminated immediately. The conflict is between a Church which assumes that conformity is a religious duty and two cannot walk together unless they be agreed, and churches which believe that the Christian way is to walk with those who are not always entirely of the same mind, but who are going the same way.

The verdict of experience seems to be in favor of our way. This sounds like rank pride, but has there ever been a freer society than America? I think not. Its freedom has rested on religious freedom and its government has never given special recognition to any single church nor granted special privileges to any religious group.

Churches can no more withstand the corruption of too much power than can any other institution. Free trade in ideas ought to include free trade in religious experience. I doubt if any man can study our Western civilization carefully without having serious questions in his mind as to the vitality of state churches when compared with the free churches. By far the majority of the Christian testimonies are in favor of churches standing on their own feet, free from state control or support.

Thoreau said:

I, on my side, require of every writer, first or last, a simple and sincere account of his own life . . . some such account as he would send to his kindred from a distant land; for if he has lived sincerely, it must have been in a distant land to me.

And again he writes:

If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away.³

This great champion of nonconformity speaks for our Protestant way. Let each man give me the account of his experience with God, for it is certain to be different from mine and it is certain to enrich my own life. How we all profit from the testimonies of the saints! Ours is not goose-step marching, but a pilgrimage with friends. Let us walk together to the music we hear, even though we may not always be in step. If our hearts beat together, that is the main thing. Can two walk together in the Church, except they be agreed? Indeed they can, and the glory of our Protestant way is that they do.

³ Krutch, *op. cit.*, III.

Personally

For the enrichment of our personal living, it is most important that we should learn how to walk the miles of compulsion with grace and dignity. There are men whose social life has become an ever-narrowing experience through the years. They move with one little group which thinks the same thoughts, has the same prejudices, uses the same vocabulary. One wonders how such people can stand another evening together, for each man must know what the others are going to say before they speak. How dull it must be never to hear a rebellious tone or listen to a radical idea. Such people are ignorant of what is going on in the world because they have withdrawn behind an iron curtain of their own making. It would be much better for them and the world if they crossed over to the other side now and again—not that they would inevitably change their positions, but that they might learn to walk with people who are not always in agreement. When one considers the opportunities we have for interracial fellowships and the timid way such opportunities are approached, we know what lies at the root of the international strife. The truth is that peace has to begin in our own hearts and on our own streets. It is little wonder that governments find it hard to walk together when neighbors seem to prefer isolation to fellowship. Some of the greatest lessons are never learned because of our preference for monotonous agreement.

Christians ought to be proficient in teaching men by precept and example how to walk under compulsion

with men whose basic assumptions are not theirs. The true Church is a fellowship cutting across the barriers of age, sex and class. When we become a middle-class institution representing a particular point of view and speaking for a special interest group, we have lost our claim to be the body of Christ. But when the Church becomes the meeting place for all men and the worship center for every person, then the things which make for peace can be created. The men who take this way discover that it not only brings them a sense of walking with their Lord, but it also makes their lives more exciting.

Much of the blame for broken marriages in our time rests upon a false assumption about the nature of the relationship involved. Too many young people have grown up under the influence of Hollywood and the cheap novels. Here they discover that marriage is a magical formula pronounced by the minister, priest, rabbi or judge, which eliminates all differences and makes disagreement forever impossible. Let it be said gently and firmly that it does not work like that. Many a time in the last few years young couples have come to me for counsel because their marriage was not working out successfully. She would say, "We have discovered that we disagree about fundamental things and of course that means we have made a mistake." Or he would say, "She comes from a different family background and she talks a foreign language to me. Obviously we were never meant for each other." Which is all nonsense! The greatest of all human adventures, the building of a marriage,

demands patience and the willingness to walk many a mile with a sense of being compelled. It is not for emotional infants. It is not too much to say that some of the greatest rewards of marriage come to those who have had to make the greatest concessions to differences of opinion.

A man said to me one time, "My wife and I have been married thirty years and we have never had a cross word between us." I wanted to reply, "Brother, I cannot think of a duller existence." I could have said also that such a statement in all probability meant that either he is a tyrant or she is. Somebody has been afraid to differ. Across the tensions of personalities there can be built the bridge of love. Can two walk together in marriage except they be agreed? Yes they can and they must, for only thus shall they find the reward and the joy of becoming one flesh.

In the home we receive so many impressions and build so many attitudes which stay with us all our lives and decisively mold our personalities. The home is the foundation of society because it represents in miniature all that we dare hope or fear for men who must live together in groups. Sometimes in a home you will find that the father is a tyrant. The moment he comes into the family circle, there is coldness and a nervous dread. The children lose their spontaneity and everyone quietly breathes a sigh of relief when he has to leave. Sometimes it is the mother who is the tyrant. She exercises her will by using gentler methods—often it is headaches—but she obtains the

same result. The home life is under her domination and must yield to her whims. And then, of course, in these days one often finds himself in a home where a child is a tyrant, and the whole family must adjust their plans to him.

But, often enough to prove that it can be done, one enters a home where there is no tyrant. Father, mother and children have learned how to be members, one of another. Decisions are not made to please consistently any single member of the family. No one gets his way altogether, but each has learned to walk with the others when it has to be done under compulsion. There is born out of this environment such a wonderful fellowship that it is hardly too much to say that such a home is a bridgehead of the Kingdom of God in this world. Persons coming out of such a training will know how to walk with all kinds of people under all kinds of circumstances. They will be the persons upon whom may rest the hopes for peace. The greatest pioneers of human progress have been the men who showed their brethren how to walk a mile with a stranger, and then go the second mile gladly.

One of the terrible tragedies of the sea was the sinking of the *Titanic* in 1912. Hundreds were lost in that disaster, and among them was Mrs. Isadore Straus. After calmly aiding people through those terrible moments of panic, she was told that she must get into a lifeboat. But she refused to stay in the boat and returned to her husband on the deck. She said, "We have been long together

through a great many difficult years. We are old now. Where you go, I will go.”⁴

And so at last, when death’s dark angel takes us by the hand and we must walk through the Valley of the Shadow, it is possible for us to have lived in such a way that we shall walk that last journey with grace and triumph. Men like that, who have conquered their fear and their pride, are the hope for the establishment of the Kingdom of the Prince of Peace on this earth.

⁴ Miller, *Why We Act That Way*, Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1946, 22.

V

Where Is Salvation?

From whence shall my help come? PSALM 121:1 (A.S.V.)

The Book of Psalms is one of the most popular books in the Bible because it explores all the moods of human life. One does not need to read in it very long, before finding some word that speaks to his immediate condition. No writing better exemplifies Jesus' admonition to weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice. Here is the poetry of life dealing with the serious questions of the human spirit. As we observe how religious men go from the heights of optimism to the depths of despair, we learn how our life must be a thing of sunshine and shadow, and we shall be redeemed from the vain hope of establishing an environment which is monotonously secure.

Yet there runs through all the Psalms the underlying spirit of a search for salvation. "From whence shall my help come?" is one of the questions always being asked,

always being answered, yet never being completed. A man is always finding himself face to face with adversaries too big for him to face alone, and he asks constantly, "Where is the source of my salvation from this enemy? To whom shall I go? What can protect me now?" The more we seek to live on a deep level, the less we are satisfied with surface success and the more distrustful we become of all those who promise some shallow solution. It is not enough to postpone physical death, but the real problem is how to make our lives something more than a long-drawn-out dying. The search for salvation is the search for life.

Yet the tragedy of the search is that it so often begins too late. Men become aware of their betrayals at the eleventh hour and their cry for salvation is often little more than a dying shriek as they go over the abyss. So the wisdom of the Bible's admonition to seek the Lord in the days of youth is vindicated constantly. It is the task of the preacher not only to answer the question of where salvation is to be found, but to learn how to inspire men to ask the question while there is a choice. The Gospel has a word for the man who has wasted his substance in riotous living, but its chief glory lies in saving men from such waste and defeat. The Christian failure is often similar to the early defeats of the democracies in World War II—we arrive with too little, too late.

In the state of Oregon, an old, abandoned church was put up for sale. There had been no services in it for many years and the denominational heads decided it

would be wisest to dispose of the property. But a storm of protest arose and the local paper was full of letters written by irate citizens objecting to the sale of a historical landmark. The man who had one time been its pastor remarked that, if people had shown that much interest in it while it was still alive, it would not have been abandoned. So it is with men and their concern for salvation. Not until the very last minute, when they have lost everything, do they ask with real intensity: "From whence shall my help come?"

There is some guidance in the Catholic idea of the two categories of sin: the venial and the deadly. The venial will harm and maim, but it will not kill. But the deadly sin will destroy completely unless it be checked immediately. It is for us to determine what the deadly sins are of our time, and then find out where the power is which can conquer them. In the contemporary drift toward ever greater and greater confusion, where is salvation? We shall be wrong if we try to separate the social evils from the personal sins now, for they are so mixed up together that it is impossible to say where one begins and the other ends. Because the hour is late, each man has to examine his own life to determine how much he is either a living part of the healing or a deadly part of the disease.

Policies Without Principles

There has developed in our day an inordinate fascination for labels. The time has come when it seems much

more important to know the right category in which to place your opponent than to be able to answer his arguments. This is to say that a generation with no firm hold on eternal moral principles will find itself yielding to what seems immediately expedient. The time could come when our lives would have no form nor reality because we had placed them at the mercy of every passing impulse. A man's life has meaning only to the extent that it becomes a living symbol of spiritual principles. He who denies this never knows when he must choose between surrender and the loss of his soul. Boswell made the following note of Samuel Johnson's feeling about men without principles:

I called upon Mr. Johnson. He said he did not like Dempster. He said he had not met any man in a long time who had given him such general displeasure. That he was totally unfixed in his principles, and wanted to puzzle over people. I told him that Dempster's principles were poisoned by David Hume, but that he was a good, benevolent sort of man. "Sir," said Mr. Johnson, "I can lay but little stress upon that instinctive, that constitutional, goodness that is not founded upon principle. I grant you that such a man may be a very good member of society. I can conceive him placed in such a situation that he is not much tempted to deviate from what is right; and so, as goodness is most eligible when there is not some strong enticement to transgress its precepts, I can conceive him doing no harm. But if such a man stood in need of money, I should not like to trust him."¹

Now in politics we have learned to expect big promises and small fulfillments, so that the very word "politician"

¹ *Boswell's London Journal*, McGraw-Hill, 1950, 317.

has an unsavory connotation. This is too bad, because we are political animals and we cannot live without political organizations. The general disrepute of "politicians" is due to the impossible demands we put on such men, and the fault belongs to society as much as it does to individual weaknesses. For every group tries to exert pressure on the men we elect to office, not with an eye single to the general welfare, but with an eye on the main chance for that particular group. This we accept as proper procedure, though we profess to be horrified when some so-called "subversive" group follows the same plan. The crisis in American politics is not so much in the breakdown of character in individual politicians, though that is bad enough, but in the generally accepted thesis that government by pressure groups is the American way. The voter who has no idea of putting principles and social welfare before personal benefit ought not be shocked if the man elected to office follows the same path.

When a political campaign is waged, we expect a certain amount of personal attack on opponents by each candidate. He may believe truly that his rival is not an honorable man, or he may let his anger get out of control in the heat of a close battle. The low state of some political campaigns held in recent times, however, goes beyond the bounds of what is allowable and reveals a sickness in the body politic which should concern every citizen. But, what is the reason for this? It is due to a lack of political principles and a desperate attempt to win

votes on the basis of promising material rewards to the voters. If this is all that is at stake, then a political campaign becomes merely a matter of calling the other man names and offering a bigger bribe. The great days of American politics are always the days when the nation is trying to make up its mind on fundamental principles of democracy. Conversely, our shabbiest times are when we have scuttled principles for election victory and for that purpose have been willing to give up the truth. This is a deadly sin from which we must be saved or we die.

This same tendency is at work in religion, and Christians, in the name of orthodox policies, can deny spiritual principles. This preference for the right creed over the right attitude is a deadly sin because it means the end of vital Christianity. I have never heard of a man being tried for not loving his enemy as the Sermon on the Mount commands, but there have been cases where men have been tried because they did not consider the doctrine of the Virgin Birth of prime importance. Not too long ago, a theological seminary in the United States discharged a professor because, among other things, he did not have the orthodox Christian viewpoint of the origin of the Devil. When a group of Christians can consider such matters of greater significance than that a man's life should exhibit the fruits of the spirit, they are sinners in the tradition of the Pharisees. It was against this kind of pride that Jesus made his most severe attacks. The bitter, mean, orthodoxy which prefers correct doctrinal statement to the spiritual principles of the teach-

ings of our Lord, is a sad witness to the fact that the deadly sins of bygone days do not die.

We are tempted to develop what may be termed "crisis behavior." That is, we assume that principles ought to apply only in times of peace and stability. When things are upset and uncertain, as they are now (and, indeed, they always are), we insist on being free from our obligations to be loyal to moral laws. Of course, we say, we believe theoretically in freedom, honor and democracy, but just now we cannot practice those things because of the threat of communism. If this philosophy were justified, we would be in a particularly serious state today, because for as far ahead as we can see, there will be no normalcy. It seems to me that we have to accept the validity of principles under all circumstances, or they are of no consequence whatsoever.

The French student of American life, de Tocqueville, says somewhere that a democracy will find it difficult to start a war and difficult to stop it. He was saying that the centralization of power necessary in wartime will be given up reluctantly, and in the name of a constant crisis, militarism attempts to become master instead of servant. Always the temptation is to regard every situation as different and the present time as inopportune. Perhaps the most subtle of all the Devil's approaches is in tempting us to say, "Of course I believe this principle of Jesus and I favor putting it in practice. But the time is not quite ripe and to force it upon people just now would do more harm than good. Just now, the wise thing to do is leave

matters alone and keep silent." Or, he comes to us and says, "In the light of the Gospel's absolutes, this is wrong, of course. But Jesus did not mean to be unreasonable, and circumstances being what they are, we must override this human value and deny this Christian teaching. We will not count this, because the circumstances are so unusual."

A contemporary writer, in the introduction to his book, says concerning the phrase "the little people":

I regard this phrase as patronizing and repulsive. There are no little people in this book. They are as big as you are, whoever you are.²

And there are no little denials of the big principles. If they are eternal, then every denial is a big denial and a mighty tragedy. Salvation is in recognizing that, when a man chooses a selfish policy over a great principle, he is indulging in a deadly sin which, if persevered in, will destroy him. If it is true that nothing is so powerful as an idea whose time has come, it is also true that the time is made right by the men who dare to practice the idea when the time is wrong. We are saved by adjusting ourselves to the principles of Jesus Christ, though it may be very inconvenient to do so.

Knowledge without Character

A pioneer democracy such as America has had little use for special privilege. Americans have tended to be

² Quoted by Schlesinger, *The Vital Center*, Houghton Mifflin, 1949, 126.

more impressed by what a man could do, rather than by his store of academic facts. When you have a rich continent to exploit, there is no place for the gentleman loafer. It is a matter of producing or being considered a parasite. Most rich men in America have not raised their sons to be idlers, though they have sometimes turned out that way. The ideal has been work, and the hero in our folklore is not the man who can live on inherited income, but the man who built a business by his own willingness to labor hard. Such a man may not always develop admirable qualities, but he must develop certain fundamental virtues, and if what he has constructed has any lasting power, it is because it was built with courage and devotion.

When the frontier is developed and a society becomes somewhat more mature, education is then more important if a man is to succeed, for knowledge means power. But when the chief goal of knowledge becomes power rather than virtue, then education consists in the training of clever crooks rather than good citizens. This is not to minimize knowledge by any means, and many a well-meaning ignorant man is a pitiful creature in his desire to be useful and his inability to function in a high-powered modern society. Such a man may desire sincerely to be useful, but to him the Lord has to say, "Well, son, I'd like to use you but your poor Model T mind just isn't good enough for this streamlined age. You are too ignorant." The fact that knowledge can go wrong is nothing in favor of putting a premium on

ignorance. Other things being equal, the more knowledge, the better hope for a good life.

Yet, one of the dangers we face in our time is making security a goal instead of the creation of an environment where each man will be challenged to be his best. Someone said that an insurance salesman is a useful member of society but he ought not to become its symbol. The very hope of removing all risk is a sign of illness, for healthy men face the risks of living with gallantry. The only real security is in a man's character, and to seek it somewhere else is a deadly sin. There can be no security outside a nation's own courage and unity, and that goes back to the individual character of every citizen.

The uncontrolled cleverness of men is a two-edged sword which cuts him who wields it. It does not bring happiness and it does not bring prosperity. It is always a divisive element. Thus it is that the generation which loses its ability to respond to goodness is doomed to destruction. One of my friends said that the purpose of the sermon is to make men want to be good and to portray goodness in such a way that it draws men unto itself. We should have learned by this time that knowledge without character is sin.

William Penn said, "They have a right to censure that have a heart to help." Neither the brittle criticism nor the scholastic superiority of the clever man is of any real value because he lacks the sympathetic heart. This is where Christianity becomes the salvation of men as it creates the loving, caring heart. That society which

makes provision for the training of men's minds but neglects the education of the heart is committing suicide. The foundation of society is not the clever man but the good man.

One of the most brilliant debaters in England's political life was Winston Churchill, and there were no dull moments when he was campaigning for office. Dr. James Mallon of Toynbee Hall related how Churchill once made a comparison between communism and fascism in a political address, and a voice from the gallery shouted out: "Oh, they're poles apart; they're poles apart." Pausing for a moment, Churchill said that he would accept that, and then went on to describe what one would find at the North and South Poles. There would be a few differences, he admitted, such as penguins at one and not at the other. But at both the Poles, he went on, there would be the same icy winds, the same barren snow fields, and the same lack of growing things. And however far apart men may be in other things, whenever they enthrone knowledge and ignore character, their lives are deadly things, withering the human spirit and freezing God's grace.

No man who has seen Germany's ruined capital can take much pride in our vaunted civilization. When one looks down on Berlin from the air, it is like looking at pictures in the *National Geographic Magazine* of archaeological expeditions digging up the ruins of ancient cities. But what is the real meaning of this horrible destruction of one of Europe's most beautiful cities? It is a story of a nation's deadly sin of preferring knowledge

to character, and it stands as a symbol of the truth that when a nation forgets goodness the moral law will crush it. No nation sought knowledge more untiringly and then put it to such diabolical use as did Germany under Hitler. Let us pray that God will create in our hearts a hunger for goodness so powerful that it will dominate and control the goals of our knowledge.

Science without Humanity

No discipline commands greater respect than science. About the worst thing that can be said of any man or idea is that they are not scientific, and the best way to get the ear of this generation is to approach it with scientific terms. This tendency is to be observed in our advertising, where everything from bread to toothpaste claims to have incorporated some new scientific formula and quotes Dr. Blank's testimony regarding its superiority. This has caused the rise of much pseudo science and much hypocritical worship of scientific jargon. During the war, one operation at Oak Ridge demanded that every particle of dust should be eliminated. In addition to air filters, women kept vacuum sweepers going back and forth over the already spotless floor. After the atomic bomb was dropped in Japan, people in the town went about asking their neighbors what part they had played in the atom-splitting project. One of the vacuum cleaner pushers said proudly, "I was sweepin' up them atom husks."³ This is about as far as much popular knowledge

³ Lilienthal, *op. cit.*, 183-84.

of science goes, but if our knowledge is inadequate, we try to make up for it with a blind worship.

This worship is founded on a sure sense of what we owe to science. No man alive today is not its debtor, and every American is influenced by it profoundly in every department of his life. When now and again we find ourselves in some primitive situation which was commonplace to our ancestors, we rapidly lose our enthusiasm for the good old days. The lessening of pain, the minimizing of drudgery, the provision of entertainment, and the beautifying of our environment are not things to despise and we know it. It is little wonder that there has developed in the West an almost idolatrous regard for science.

Nor is there any going back to a situation before the benefactor was discovered. Now and again someone suggests in all seriousness that we ought to declare a moratorium on science, which is as foolish as King Canute commanding the waves to retreat. We are on a one-way passage and, having started, we can never go back. The development of village industries in India may have been justified as a part of Gandhi's program to make India independent of Britain, but as a general policy for the world, it is futile. We are not going to have less science, but we are going to have more of it. It is not going to play a less important part in our life, but an increasingly significant part in our life. The wave of the future is a scientific wave and already we see it rolling into the Orient. The blind attacks made from time to

time on science are not only silly, they are impossible. The power that can ease our burdens and give us control over nature is a great servant of mankind and scientists have been some of our greatest men. Science is a story with mighty spiritual and religious implications.

Yet every thoughtful man stands in fear before this giant of our creation. For suddenly, and perhaps when it is too late, we discover that we have been wrong in regarding it as something above or outside the moral law. How often in past days have we heard that the scientist, as such, is neither concerned nor responsible for how his discoveries may be applied. The whole spirit of this discipline was objective, by which we meant without social responsibility. And all of this is false! We look with horror on German physicians who lent themselves and their skill to the horrible experiments of the Nazis. We shudder at the willingness of men to build engines of mass destruction for our enemies to use, and then hasten to dedicate our best skill for the same purposes in the name of self-preservation. Something has gone wrong, and the more we vision the war of the future, the more we see the mistake made long ago in assuming that any knowledge is to be given freedom from moral restraint.

This is now clearly a deadly sin. The scientist is just as much a moral agent as is the minister or the professor. Everything that man does has social implications, and the man who refuses to accept that truth is an enemy of his fellows. All of this mistaken view of science and

scientists has arisen in a split people trying to divide their lives into departments. It is the sign of an evil and perverse generation and would not have been possible in an age of faith. Let it be said so clearly that no man can feel guiltless when he denies it: every man is responsible for every other man and each bears the sins of all. Science has to be brought back into the fold of humanity and the dichotomy between science and religion or science and the humanities has to be destroyed. The racketeer who excuses himself because he is giving people what they want is in just as defensible a position as the scientist who prostitutes his knowledge to provide terrifying torture and death in the name of national defense. Somewhere, the vicious circle has to be broken if we are to survive, and the start has to be made where the Christian Faith still has a recognized authority. Salvation lies finally in men who will not use their knowledge to serve ends that their moral natures cannot approve.

Suppose we should talk about the power of the atom for goodness. At once the atomic scientists can picture unlimited possibilities of power to produce good things for men. They can dream of new health discoveries and portray a great benefit for the human race. Why then this fear of the atom-splitting power? It is a fear of immoral uses. But men decide whether the use of our knowledge is to be moral or immoral and men, individual men, must take the responsibility. This is the greatness of man and our retreat from this truth about us in the realm of science has been disastrous—indeed a deadly

sin. George Bernard Shaw put it like this in his Preface to *Man and Superman*:

This is the true joy of life, the being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one; the being thoroughly worn out before you are thrown on the scrapheap; the being a force of Nature instead of a feverish, selfish little clod of ailments and grievances complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy.⁴

And this has an application for the scientist as well as any man.

Perhaps what we are trying to say is simply that science has had too little humility and too much arrogance. It has tended to lord it over the other human pursuits and it has often assumed that nothing mattered but knowledge of facts. In spite of many warnings, we have not changed our ways, and today we know that we were wrong. Sin is pride, and only when we remember the spirit of Him who taught mankind a lesson it cannot quite learn but cannot completely forget—that greatness lies in service—are we able to be saved.

Worship without Sacrifice

One main weakness of Protestantism is an overemphasis on freedom, which has resulted in license. We have fled from the idea of sacrifice and, as a result, our so-called worship is weak and ineffectual. If it is true that the Catholic heresy is to equate the Church with the Kingdom of God, then it is the Protestant heresy to

⁴ Shaw, *Man and Superman*, Brentano, 1903.

regard the Church as of no importance to the Kingdom of God. Consequently we treat the fellowship of Christians as of no essential importance and we seek in vain to come into the presence of God without effort or devotion. The Church is to do something for us, we are agreed, but our obligations to the Church are taken very lightly. A man may go to hear a popular preacher now and then, but the very idea that every man has an obligation to God which he ought to pay by entering the sanctuary and worshipping Him, sounds to a modern Protestant like a medieval superstition. Yet this is certainly a far cry from the spirit of the Reformers. They did not leave the Catholic Church in order to escape the obligations put upon them by the Church, but that their worship might be purified. Our gradual drift away from the religious concept of worship involving sacrifice and duty has been due to the infiltration of the secular world, and is idolatry.

In the matter of our financial sacrifice there has been a growing tendency to give only out of the surplus and never in proportion to the need of the world. The very idea of the "collection" has been so cheapened and joked about that our giving has the same dignity as slipping a dime to a panhandler. A Christian ought to take his giving seriously enough to think about it and plan for it. The haphazard giving characteristic of so many church members prevents, more than any single thing, a complete and meaningful worship experience. The world's need is great and our giving is so small that no outsider

could believe that we regard the worship of God through our service to men as much more than an empty creed. The beginning of some plan of systematic giving has been the beginning of a vital religious experience for many a man.

We take the whole matter of church attendance and church obligations in such a way as to make the whole thing a travesty. We do not think it necessary to give up anything for regular attendance and, as a result, our spiritual life atrophies. We sing "Like a mighty army, moves the church of God," but we are deserters and the army falters. The truth is that men often take their service clubs much more seriously than they take their church, and women put secular organizations first and their churches receive whatever left-over energy they have. I call this a deadly sin, because it is the death of the spirit and the end of vital religion.

A friend of mine came to me in some perturbation one time and confessed that his daughter had just informed him she was going to marry a Catholic. He was genuinely troubled, but I could give him little comfort. He had sent his daughter to Sunday school when she was very young, but he had not insisted that she go later on and he had never taken the trouble to go with her. Golf came first on bright Sundays and his giving was sporadic and uncertain. Now he was upset because his daughter had no idea that Protestantism meant anything to him or to the family. She did not think there would be any problem in marrying a Catholic, any more than it would be

a problem for a Republican to marry a Democrat. She had no idea that worship was a serious business or that church affiliation meant anything more than convenience. I almost lost my friend when I suggested that it might be better for his daughter to become a faithful Catholic than to be an indifferent Protestant. Worship that is not serious, sacrificial and faithful is no worship at all. Like a man who is vaccinated, such churchmen are immune from the real experience of the presence of God in Christ.

God will not be so treated. The Old Testament developed a complicated and involved sacrificial system which was attacked by the Prophets. But the attack was on its mechanical nature and its misunderstanding of the spiritual nature of God. They did not substitute license for sacrifice, but insisted rather that a broken and a contrite heart was to be preferred over lambs and doves. The high point of Old Testament worship was always sacrifice, and the waiting worshiper received his vision and assurance only after he had paid his obligations to his God.

The courage of Jesus in appealing to the courage of men instead of to their desire for ease is one of the most remarkable things about him. He was enlisting followers and he called on them to take up their crosses and follow him. The most difficult demands were made with a wonderful assumption that men would respond. And they did! How different is our fear to ask anything difficult and our willingness to make religion a matter of

the left-overs. Many a layman and minister would have a difficult time in remembering the last time they really sacrificed anything for the sake of Christ. The salvation of men waits for their willingness to give up the world for Christ's sake. Our pale worship is deadly.

A missionary executive related that an Indian minister reported there had been no improvement in his Church membership during the past year. He meant to say that there had been no increase in membership, but perhaps he was wiser than he knew when he spoke of lack of improvement. "The trouble with this Church," said another Indian minister, "is that there are no surprises in it."⁵ Improvements and surprises are not to be expected when men try to worship without sacrifice.

This generation is desperate for salvation, because it knows it is lost. But four deadly sins stand in the way and must be washed away by the power of God. We must be saved from policies without principles, knowledge without character, science without humanity, and worship without sacrifice. Let us have faith to believe that if we confess our sins He is faithful to forgive, and come to our help.

⁵ Goodall, *One Man's Testimony*, Harper, 1949, 75.

VI

Who Is Responsible?

And the officers shall speak unto the people, and they shall say, What man is there that is fearful and fainthearted? let him go and return unto his house, lest his brethren's heart faint as well as his heart. DEUTERONOMY 20:8

This ancient battle rule goes directly to the heart of the question concerning man's responsibility to his fellows. No man lives unto himself and even his attitudes are contagious. This central emphasis on human responsibility runs through all the Bible and it is one of the fundamental contributions Israel has made to the world. The personal nature of freedom is an anchor which holds it steady against the tides of anarchy and license. Yet it also puts the responsibility where it belongs and keeps us from losing ourselves in a vague feeling of innocence because of the sins of society. The careless word or the indecent fear of one man poisons his brethren and weakens the cause. The downfall of a society or a civilization

begins the moment people forget this and deny their individual obligations.

We have a famous story in the Old Testament which illustrates the working of this principle. After Gideon had been convinced that he was chosen by God to free the land from the Midian occupation, he called the men of Israel to join him, and thirty-two thousand responded. Then came the application of the battle rule, and he invited all who were fainthearted to return to their homes. The response must have startled him, for twenty-two thousand confessed their fear and left the army. But, as if this were not enough, God told Gideon that there were still too many—which is to say, even those who had not publicly confessed their fright were not tough enough to stand against a determined foe. Then came the drinking test, where each man was to be judged by the way he quenched his thirst at the brook, with the dismissal of all but three hundred men who alone lapped the water as a dog laps. But with the three hundred men, the battle was won and the invaders driven from the land.

Today we are prone to trust in quantity rather than quality. This is the time of mass movements, big nations, and victory by the pressure of sheer numbers. The danger is that we shall lose sight of the dignity and power of one man and that we shall minimize the personal responsibility of men. It is time for the Church to proclaim with trumpet tone that an industrial society, however mechanized, still rests on persons; and that the quality

of personal life determines the destiny of society. If a man's heart is fearful, let him face the hard fact that he has it within his power to betray good endeavors by infecting others with his fear. Of course, we shall see also that there is a brighter side to this picture and a man's courage and faith are contagious things, strengthening and encouraging his brethren.

The Enemy Within

The implication of this insight is that the real enemy is always within rather than without. The deterioration of organizations is due usually to an inner wasting away rather than to external pressure. This is a religious insight rather than a secular viewpoint and it represents one of the eternal conflicts between these two views of life. The secularist can never be convinced that spiritual forces are determinative, but believes rather that the world of the spirit is tenuous and uncertain. The real world, he will insist, is the observable world and the real forces are power pressures. The conflict between idealists and so-called practical men, between the natural man and the spiritual man, lies in this realm. Or, to go back to Gideon, the secularist would much prefer thirty-two thousand men in his army, even though they might be half-committed, than only three hundred fearless men utterly devoted to the cause and putting their trust in God. By our actions, most of us feel the same way.

But one of the greatest of Jewish contributions is its prophetic interpretation of history. To oversimplify that

view, it assumed that God was the lord of history and that the determining forces were spiritual rather than mechanical in their nature, which meant that mere size and power were not the ultimate factors. So there has never been a nation standing under the judgment of men who interpreted events in this light to the extent that Israel was judged by her Prophets. And the amazing thing is that they blamed Israel's disasters on Israel and not on her enemies.

This is all the more remarkable when you realize that Israel was a small nation surrounded by tremendous empires. She stood in the way of ambitious rulers and could hardly expect to be more than a pawn in the game. Yet so firmly did the Prophets believe in God's power that they interpreted all political disasters and all military defeats as judgments upon Israel for her sin. It was their faith that a faithful nation would have on its side a power undefeatable by any empire or combination of forces. When we observe how prone we are to put the blame for all our difficulties on some enemy outside, we are astounded at this prophetic word. The very nature of nationalism leads to the seeking of a scapegoat, and the man who calls a nation to account for its failures is regarded by many professional patriots as a traitor, as we in America are learning more each day. But for Israel there was no escape from the Prophet's word of scorn for her betrayals nor from his word of judgment for her sins. Let the nation face its own sin and be more concerned with the injustices and immoralities of its own

life, was the constant refrain of these great spiritual leaders.

Interestingly enough, Arnold Toynbee would agree that the prophetic interpretation was essentially correct, not only for Israel, but for every civilization. His remarkable *A Study of History*, attacked by the secularists as one would expect, asserts that the societies which failed were victims of inner failure rather than outer attack. To put it in the light of the Old Testament, too many people with fearful hearts infected their society and weakened it. For the strength of a people is in faith and not techniques, in unity of spirit rather than numbers.

The Church has sometimes forgotten this, to its detriment. The leaders of the early Church did not forget it and they emphasized the importance of each member regarding himself as obligated to hold up the fellowship. That is why the lists of sins in the New Testament emphasize the sins against the fellowship. It is the weakening of the Church's unity, the sowing of distrust among the members, the attack on one another, which those writers warned against. They seemed to be more concerned with the quality of the spiritual life of members of the Church than they were with the pressure of the empire. Any minority group becomes aware of this enemy within, but when the minority becomes a majority, it often forgets it, though it is still true.

When the Book of Acts records the story of Ananias and Sapphira, it is revealing its awareness of this princi-

ple. A man and his wife who had sold a field lied about the price received and withheld part of it after they had agreed to put all their money into a common treasury. They were stricken dead. The grievous nature of the sin was in their betrayal of the fellowship and their introduction of deceit into its life. When members of the Christian community grow suspicious of one another, then more harm has been done than all the worldly powers can ever inflict.

Some years ago, Dr. S. Parkes Cadman gave a lecture to men every Sunday afternoon at a Brooklyn branch of the Y.M.C.A., and then answered questions. One afternoon he was asked, "Do the dead live?" His reply was, "They certainly do; if you don't believe it come down to my church and have a look at some of my deacons." Any church member will know what he meant. But we ought not to let the humor of the reply hide the tragedy it describes. It is not the secular forces as such which we should fear, but the laymen and ministers in the church who are dead but still walk about, throttling its life with their coldness and unresponsiveness.

The sad state of our home life is causing concern to every thoughtful man, and you can hardly attend a religious conference without the situation being described over and over again. We are agreed that it is harder to maintain a Christian home today than in certain periods of the past. We shall not minimize the pressures of the modern city on families. But when a Methodist woman says, as one did to me not long ago, "We never believed

in having liquor in our home but we have to do it because of my husband's business career," it is time to call a halt to our alibis. The issue, as always, is a matter of personal responsibility rather than social pressure. A Christian home today, as always, rests on character; and when parents lack that, they find it easy to put the blame on the evil times. A Christian home has never been an easy thing to create, and its chief enemy has always lurked inside rather than in community conditions. It will be a sad thing if Christian people subscribe to the easy theory that difficulties of modern life excuse them from their Christian obligations to provide their children with a Christian environment.

It is easy enough to blame personal disasters on one's companions. We often excuse one another by saying that we were with the wrong group. Quite so! But we must also face the stubborn fact that we choose the group and by our choice we proclaim the kind of person we are. No man can tell to what extent he or any other man is to blame for what happens, which is the reason we must leave the final judgments to God. But it is an unhealthy attitude which takes refuge in believing that my failure is due always to another's failure, or to a bad break. Usually the fault is somewhere in ourselves and our destiny is charted in our own hearts. Like everything else we know, there are exceptions, but we will do well to come to terms with the spiritual principle which affirms that the real enemy is within.

Morale

For another thing, this text is speaking about the significance of morale. We use that word often enough, but we find it difficult to define, for it represents a spirit that can be felt when it is present and missed when it is absent, but does not yield itself to precise description. It has something to do with unity of spirit in a group; it means belief in one another and in the goals of the group; it signifies a willingness to put the cause above the personal recognition. No leader can succeed without it and every great leader has been able to create it. Perhaps it is best to say that morale is present when each man feels a personal responsibility to be his best for the sake of his companions and their common goal.

We see it in the athletic world. While there are exceptions, the all-star aggregation hardly ever measures up to its potential possibilities. Games are not won by stars as such, but by teams. It may be a distinct handicap to have too many stars on one team at the same time, and it is certainly a handicap when jealousy makes a man prefer to see the team defeated than to see his rival achieve fame. Which is to say that we need leaders, but not too many at one time in one place. Life is so constituted that it has to be played in co-operation, and the morale of the group is an ultimate factor.

I saw a football team one time go through an undefeated season, after ending at the bottom the year before, and it had practically the same personnel both years.

The opposition was not less but greater the second year, nor could the difference between the two seasons be accounted for by any external factor. One was driven to conclude that something had happened among the players themselves. We have seen mediocre teams rise to the heights and we have watched the great teams go down before inferior opposition, and one man can make all the difference, either for good or ill.

Military men are aware of this spiritual factor and history tells of many victories won by morale. A man one time related his experience in World War I. He said that the officers serving under a certain colonel were given the right to apply for transfer, if they so desired, and every man applied. This was so unusual that an investigation was made to determine the reason. It was discovered that, while the colonel was an able man in many ways, he did not seem to trust any man under him. If he gave an order, he stood by to make sure it was executed according to his wish. No other man had any real authority, and no man felt that he was a trusted part of the organization. Such a man as the colonel was of little use to an army, in spite of his military education and his technical competence. Battles are won not only by superior matériel and numbers, but by faith. One of the greatest armies in Europe surrendered after putting up only token resistance, because French soldiers did not believe in their leaders, and their leaders did not believe in their cause.

Nations are prone to place too little importance on the

morale factor in their national life. It is not the force of the enemy that is the most dangerous thing, but the unity or lack of it within the people. Look at Britain! The heroic stand made against Nazism in 1940 would not have been possible for a people infected with the divisive force of fear. In some ways, that was their finest hour, but it was so not alone because of the force of the crisis, but because of a long heritage of unity and democracy. Only morale could take a people through the Blitz, which is to say that only faith was a defense against the ruthless aggressor. One feels it in the British life of today, which, in spite of shortages and economic difficulties, holds the people steady. A Dutch boy said to me in Amsterdam, "I don't like the English. Wherever an Englishman stands, he thinks that is England." Well, this is both irritating and admirable. It means that an Englishman never stands alone but feels that he has the backing of his people and a responsibility to them.

The difference between a unified nation and a split one is soon apparent. It comes out in the attitude of rival politicians toward one another and the extent to which party is put before the country. A people may judge its spiritual strength when its leaders seek to assassinate one another's character at the very moment when the country is threatened by outside enemies. Wide variance of political opinion is not weakening to a nation if there is mutual trust in people, but if the time comes when we prefer to see the foe have his way rather than see our rivals within the nation win a victory, the betrayal is far

along. The people will evermore honor King Albert of Belgium, but they will never do more than pity his son. It is a fine thing to preserve the historical buildings of the nation's cities, but it is a poor bargain to give in exchange for a people's soul. It is not military invasion which destroys a people, but an invasion of selfishness and fear.

The Church can withstand all kinds of shocks and attacks, so long as it does not break up within itself. We have had an epidemic of attacks on the Church's social views. This is particularly true in any period of adjustment after a war, and it is most apparent when international and political pressures arise. The forces which fear change the most always strive for the support of the Church, for it is properly a conservative institution. If they cannot have the full-hearted support they desire, the next best thing is to cast suspicion on the Church's prophetic gospel. This is done by sowing distrust among the members of the Church by attacking any nonconformist element as "pink" or "communist." Christians ought to be used to having names pinned on them, but there are those who feel that the worst possible thing which threatens the Church is criticism from the outside. In a kind of panic, they turn on the erring brethren and attempt to silence them.

Now all of this has happened many times before but we never seem to learn that the Church must include men of widely differing political and economic views. It would be a failure if it failed to do so, and such a variance

of opinion is a sign of its strength and not weakness. Nor should we ever believe that criticism is a sign of failure—quite the contrary. A church that does not proclaim a criticism of society pointed enough to merit counterattack, is not worth its salt. The only thing we have to worry about is the possibility that the attack will sow distrust among the fellowship. With a sure sense of the most effective manner by which the Church can be made weak and ineffectual, her enemies attack groups within it and strive to destroy the faith which Christians have in one another. The man who ceases to believe in his brethren can do more damage to the Church than the Devil. Whenever our hearts are not fearful and we refuse to allow wedges of suspicion to be driven among us, then the Church never need be frightened, for the gates of hell cannot prevail against it.

A little girl sent on an errand was gone longer than her mother thought proper. Upon her return she asked for an explanation. "Oh," was the reply, "I met Mary and her doll was broken so I stopped to help her." "You mean you helped her fix the doll?" asked the mother. "No," said the little girl, "I stopped to help her cry." In that impulse to help men weep and help them rejoice, there is the spirit of Christian morale. As we share one another's woes and one another's joys, power is released. My fear is something to be shared only with God, but my sympathy is to be shared with all men, for in that sharing there is the foundation of the beloved community.

Contagion of Faith

A nation seldom knows its greatest men until after they have done their work. This is inevitable, since a man's work is not made manifest until the years have tested it. We discover finally that the greatest contribution made by any man was his faith in mighty principles rather than his actual accomplishments. So it has not been the talents in themselves which have made men great, but the purposes and causes for which their lives became symbols.

There are men who never go to Washington without paying a visit to the Lincoln Memorial. They have seen it many times but it has become a shrine to them and they find strength within its pillars at the feet of that marvelous figure of Abraham Lincoln. I stood there not long ago and asked myself what it symbolized. It is not merely a poor boy who became a president of the United States, nor is it significant because Lincoln was a war president. I do not think it is because he saved the union. That Memorial is an American shrine because it stands for faith in men and God, and a humble willingness to be an instrument in the hands of God for the service of men. Like "an affirming flame," that spirit has run through our national life and in other days of stress and strain we have been guided by it.

There have been shabby periods in our history, like the present one. Their shabbiness has not been due to lack of men who could have led us, but lack of men who

had faith enough in God and America to be servants of the people. Dr. Walter Van Kirk recounted an experience at a conference:

A few days ago I attended a conference in Washington. The discussion turned to surplus commodities. It was proposed that some of our surplus wheat be sent to India. Such a move, it was argued, would lessen the fear of communism in that country. I ventured the opinion that there was less fear of communism in India where there is a wheat shortage than in the United States where there is a wheat surplus. There was present one of the top-flight leaders of the Republican party. I shall refer to him as Mr. X. This Mr. X in reply to my observation, said, "If there is less fear of communism in India than in the United States it must be because there is a real leader in India." To which another member of the conference retorted, "Or maybe it is because there is no Senator McCarthy in India."¹

Political attacks which are obviously nothing more than cheap attempts to get publicity ought to cause us more concern than a possible attack from without. The real American benefactors have been men who gave us reason to be proud of the American faith.

We shall be wrong if we think that our chief weapon against communism is money. Across the world there has grown up the idea that people left to themselves will turn toward Russia, and the only way we can hold them to the democratic way is through subsidies. Let us not play down the importance of material help, but let it be the expression of our faith and sympathy and not a bribe. More important than anything we can do for other peo-

¹ *The Christian Century*, May 3, 1950.

ples, is the sharing of our faith with them. It has been this contagious force which has turned the eyes of the world westward and it has been the mightiest weapon any nation ever had. No other people ever had the means for winning good will which we have inscribed on the Statue of Liberty. In the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights, America announced its faith, and only by denying it can we ever be defeated. If fear and faintheartedness infect and spread, so it is true also that faith and courage strengthen and invade.

One of America's greatest men was Wendell Phillips. Here is a description of one reason for his greatness:

In a world afflicted with self-indulgence it is an extraordinary phenomenon. It had been Phillips' youthful ambition to become a United States senator. With everything in his favor to enable him to realize that ambition, he had cast it aside to devote himself to an unpopular cause. He had lost the good will of relatives and friends, had risked confinement in an insane asylum, had made himself an outcast in society, and when not on the road lecturing had lived like a recluse. For an entire generation when walking the streets of his beloved Boston he had encountered black and hostile looks; at one time his person and his house had had to be guarded against mob violence. At last the fog had lifted. The heavens smiled upon him. He was only in his fifties, and after years of unpopularity, popular at last! His integrity and courage had finally been recognized and had gained him prestige, admiration, loyalty. There were few offices to which he could not have been elected, few posts of honor not within his reach. And what did the extraordinary man do? When the Anti-Slavery Society adjourned *sine die* he remarked to a friend: "Now that the field is won, do you sit

by the camp-fire, but I will put out in the underbrush," and forthwith aligned himself with a cause more unpopular than Abolition had ever been.²

If you want to know what has made America great, look to men like that and be ashamed of some of the men who represent us today. Our heritage is the faith in the dignity of man which has been bequeathed to us by men like Wendell Phillips.

A church is no different from a nation in this respect. It grows great on the faith of the men who lead it. Methodists are both fortunate and unfortunate in having such a strong sense of connectionalism; fortunate in a feeling of mutual responsibility, but always in danger of one small man setting his fear loose among his fellows. I know a Conference where no constructive program was launched for years because a small group under the influence of one preacher prevented it. But I have been in a Conference under the leadership of a great Bishop where every man was strengthened in his ministry by that man's faith.

In a local church, too often one man or one small group of men have stood in the way of that church's spiritual growth and influence. Why does not some man of faith speak his word and break that obstruction? The faith of a single layman could be the instrument for the church's advance in many a situation. Norman Thomas, perennial Socialist candidate for the presidency of the United States, has the respect of a vast number of men

² Korngold, *Two Friends of Man*, Little, Brown, 1950, 363-66.

who have never voted for him. He was being introduced one time before a group of distinguished men and the chairman commented on this general respect. Mr. Thomas rose to speak and said: "I would gladly exchange some of this respect for a little support." Christian faith is more than respect for Christ, which he really does not need. It is support of his program and witnessing for his way. Many a Christian would be surprised if he knew how his lack of faith has betrayed his Master, and how much his courage to proclaim his faith would mean to the Kingdom of God.

Power of One Man

We come at last to the inevitable conclusion that responsibility lies with each man. If it is a terrible burden for a man to bear, it is also a glorious promise of his significance. This is the beginning of democracy and freedom, for as long as a man feels himself a subject of the state instead of a citizen of the nation, he will feel justified in simply following the crowd. A symptom of a general disease in our modern life is our loss of the sense of our power and responsibility for what happens in our world. Too many modern people in our modern culture have no interest in matters beyond their own appetites and their immediate senses. As a result, they strive to relieve their boredom by indulging further their appetites and their senses. Finally, their jaded bodies can no longer respond and an intense sense of emptiness and futility has its way with them. The mental hospital, the nervous

breakdown, the ulcers, the hypertensions are all waiting for the man who follows this dark path. The healing lies in a recovery of the power in a life when it is dedicated to a fine end.

The poet Paul Laurence Dunbar describes this truth in these words:

Minorities since time began
Have shown the better side of man;
And often in the lists of Time
One man has made a cause sublime.³

One man afraid is like a disease germ in the body, but one man with faith is like the white corpuscles in the blood.

This is the word the preacher needs. There are few of us who have not at one time or another seriously doubted the value of our speaking. St. Paul spoke for us all when he referred to "the foolishness of preaching." One of the finest pastors I know said to me one time, "Do you really think it is worthwhile preparing sermons and working as hard on them as you seem to do?" I could answer him honestly, "I think it is not only worth all the time I put on them, but a hundred times more." There have been too many instances of people saying to me that a word they heard in a sermon had given them courage to try again. It is amazing how many young people will confess that their first serious interest in religion came after hearing

³ Reprinted by permission of Dodd, Mead & Company from *The Complete Poems of Paul Laurence Dunbar*. Copyright, 1913, by Dodd, Mead & Company.

a man speak his word of testimony. No more important activity is being carried on in the country than preaching from the pulpits by men conscious of being called as spokesmen of the will of God.

Let us go back once more to Wendell Phillips.

When finally Phillips stepped forward to deliver the valedictory address, the whole audience rose to its feet and gave him the greatest ovation of his career. He spoke feelingly of the society's work, paid tribute to its founder, and finished with these words, the significance of which did not escape those who had watched his growing interest in the labor movement:

We will not say Farewell, but All Hail. Welcome new duties! We sheathe no sword. We only turn the front of the army upon a new foe.⁴

Of such as these are the sons of God. This is man filled with the sense of his potential power. If the fifth column can betray a people by spreading doubt and suspicion, the consecrated minority can save a people by its faith.

I sat one night in Munich with a group of friends listening to a German professor describe the whole Hitler movement as primarily a matter of economics. He intimated that the average German did not know what was going on in the concentration camps, and was not aware of the Jewish persecution. Now there was with us in the party a Jew whom I regard as one of my very good friends. He had told me of his illness on first coming into Berlin as he remembered the persecution and suffering his people had endured there. We had been at Dachau

⁴ Korngold, *op. cit.*, 353.

that morning and heard from a former inmate of that infamous place what unspeakable things had been done to the prisoners. We had listened to a young chaplain describe what he had seen when the Americans first entered the Camp. My Jewish friend arose at the close of the lecture and apologized for what he was about to say, but said he could not help speaking. Then he described what he knew about the treatment Jews had received—the concentration camps, the hounding from business, the work camps, the deportations, the tortures. "This man," he said, referring to the professor, "was a Nazi and I hold him responsible for what was done to my people."

In the silence that followed, strangely enough, I felt no pride that this could not be said of me. I remembered the times when I should have spoken and kept silent. I recalled the denials of brotherhood and democracy which were at my own doorstep, yet no one had heard my protest. You think such things cannot happen here? They can happen anywhere a people get smug and wherever men lose their personal sense of guilt and accountability. If there is one mighty lesson which rises out of all the horror and suffering of our time, it is that the only hope for a good world rests upon individuals who will accept the hard but glorious truth that each man is responsible.